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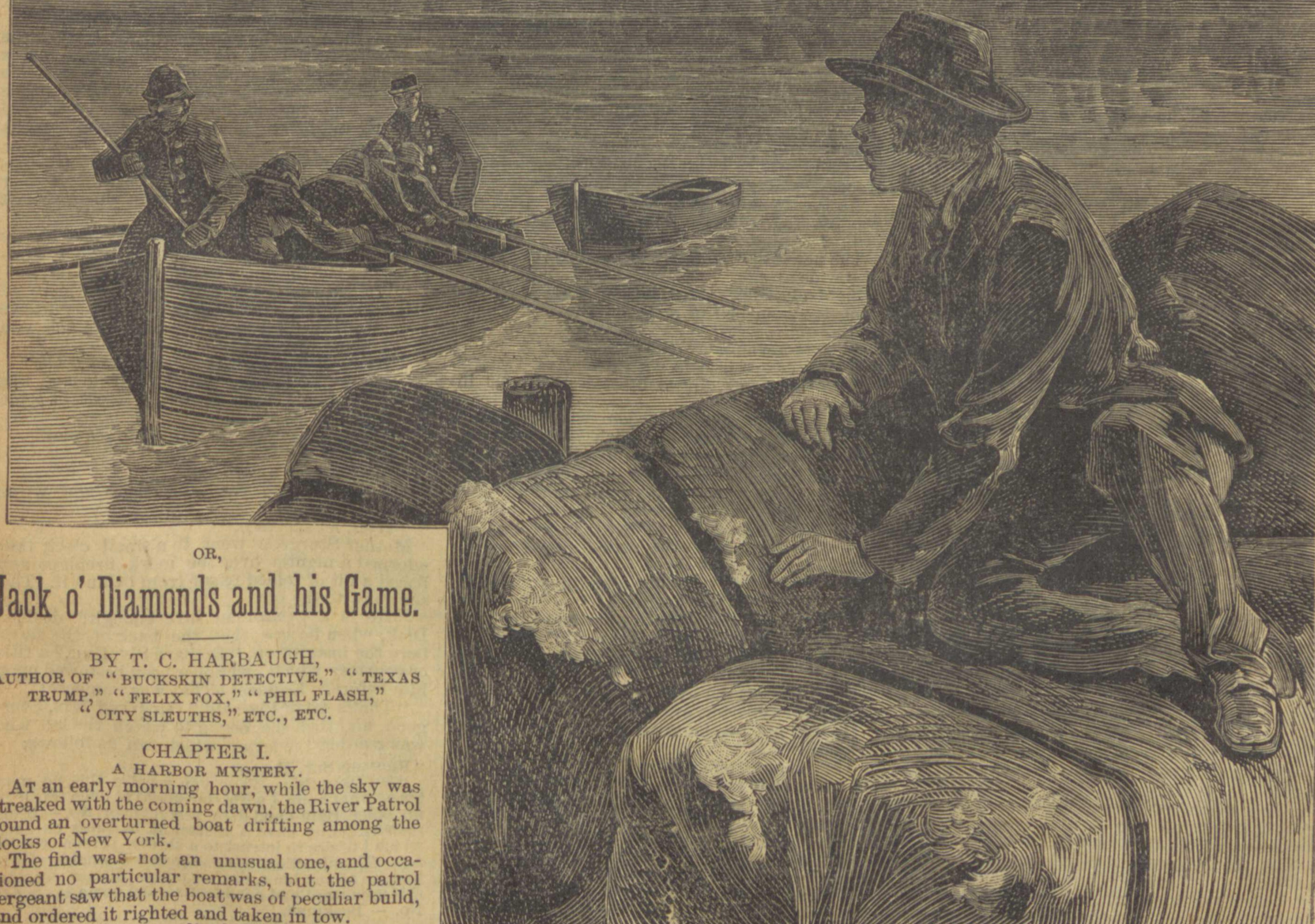
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DODGER DICK THE WHARF-SPY DETECTIVE



OR,

Jack o' Diamonds and his Game.

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AUTHOR OF "BUCKSKIN DETECTIVE," "TEXAS
TRUMP," "FELIX FOX," "PHIL FLASH,"
"CITY SLEUTHS," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A HARBOR MYSTERY.

AT an early morning hour, while the sky was streaked with the coming dawn, the River Patrol found an overturned boat drifting among the docks of New York.

The find was not an unusual one, and occasioned no particular remarks, but the patrol sergeant saw that the boat was of peculiar build, and ordered it righted and taken in tow.

The prize was accordingly taken to the nearest pier and secured to it in the usual manner.

"WHAT HAS OLD FIX FOUND NOW?" QUERIED DODGER DICK.

These latter proceedings were watched by a boy who lay at full length on a lot of baled cotton, which evidently had been his bed, for the night had been pleasant, and the morning breeze, as it came cityward over the waters of the bay, seemed to have been shorn of its usual chill.

"What has Old Fix found now I wonder?" queried the boy, when he saw the patrol sergeant, whom he recognized as one Frederick Fix, a man for whom, from his manner of speech, he did not have the kindest feelings.

Nobody saw the boy on the bales, and when the patrol had secured the picked-up boat, they vanished in the morning mists.

"That makes the second event for me since I occupied this cotton-bale hotel," the wharf lad went on to himself, and a moment later he scrambled down from the bales and moved toward the boat.

In stature he was about as large as boys of sixteen usually are; his build was good, and his face had much expression. His eyes were dark, not black, and keen, and his movements denoted unusual agility.

His garments were not of the best, as a matter of course. Boys who sleep on the wharves and piers do not dress like those who repose on soft beds; but the clothes were whole and comfortable—much better than those of the common street vagabond.

"That is the same boat! I'd bet a hundred on it!" he exclaimed, leaning over the guard of the dock and scrutinizing the prize of the patrol. "A while before midnight I saw three persons leave this very pier in that boat. Now it comes back in the hands of the harbor cops, picked up somewhere out yonder where their lanterns find lots of strange things. What became of the three who went out in the craft?"

The boy seemed eager to get to the bottom of what appeared to him a mystery. He lowered himself over the wharf and dropped into the row-boat.

It gave forth ample evidence of having been overturned, for considerable water was yet in it.

The boy began his search at once, and it did not occupy much time.

Under a seat in the stern he found a mass of cordage, which had been wedged in there so tightly that it had not fallen out while the boat remained capsized.

He drew it forth and began to look through it in the light just then breaking over city and harbor.

"Hello! what is this?" he cried out, diving at something that glittered in the mass. "A ring, as I live!" and he held up in triumph a small ring whose set, if he was a judge, was a solitaire diamond, not large, but unusually fine.

The wharf lodger wondered how the ring found its way to the cordage, but he went on with the search, which produced nothing else worth taking.

He transferred the "find" to his pocket, and stuffed the cordage back under the stern-seat, then climbed nimbly upon the pier and disappeared.

Some boys would have carried the ring to Police Headquarters, but this boy, known all along the water-front as Dodger Dick, did nothing of the kind.

Perhaps he thought that whatever he found was his, especially after it had escaped the eyes of Frederick Fix, the man whom he did not regard with any kindly feeling.

Half an hour later the lad came suddenly into the presence of a woman who occupied a small room in a wooden tenement, some distance from the river.

She was about fifty, with a thin, sallow face, and eyes that told her disposition.

"A pretty time to be getting in!" cried the woman at sight of Dick, and in the voice of a perpetual scold. "It's a wonder the cops don't take the likes o' you and send you to the Island! One o' these days I'll be pulled for harboring a boy whose only occupation is prowlin' around o' nights. You ought to have some respect for me, Dick Sly."

The semblance of a smile appeared at the corners of the boy's mouth. He had heard the same whine before, and the manner in which he treated the woman told that she was not his mother.

"Well, wherever I was I had a good bed!" he declared. "I tell you it isn't everybody who can sleep on a ten-thousand dollar—"

"On the wharves again!" interrupted the woman.

"Under the stars, tra la!" laughed Dick, beginning to dance about the room, while his eyes sparkled.

The woman watched him with an expression between anger and contempt.

All at once Dick ceased his antics, and came toward the old woman. One of his hands was partially lost in the depths of a pocket.

"It is sometimes profitable to sleep by the river. Look here!" and he held up the ring, whose glitter at once caught the woman's eye.

She almost left her chair in her eagerness to inspect the prize, the value of which she seemed to determine at a glance.

"No, you don't," cried Dick, drawing back, but still keeping the ring in sight. "What's mine is mine. If I had slept here, or at the Fifth Avenue last night I wouldn't have found anything equal to this."

"It is shoddy, as anybody can see with half an eye," replied the woman.

"Then you don't care about handling it; ha! ha!" was the retort.

"Where did you find it?" she now asked, eagerly enough.

"In the most unlikely place in the world."

"Tell me."

"In a boat which the harbor cops brought in early this morning."

"And you?"

"I was lying awake on some cotton-bales on the wharf."

"Playing spy, eh?"

"Waiting for some kind of fish to come into the net."

"Well, a gold-fish came, I see," and the woman looked at the ring longingly, and then she added, with a laugh, as she thrust forward a hand, "I believe it will just fit one of my fingers."

"There's not the least doubt of it, but we'll not try it just now," retorted the boy, as, much to her disappointment, he put the ring back into his pocket.

"Of course you'll hunt the owner?" she went on.

"Of course I will do what I think best, Mother Sturgeon," was the response, and Dick went toward the door.

"Don't you want any breakfast?"

"I breakfasted on daylight awhile ago," and, a minute later, the door had closed on the night-walker, and Mother Sturgeon was the only occupant of the room.

"Don't I know that that ring is worth money—probably a hundred dollars?" she murmured. "He was very careful to tell me that he found it in a boat at the dock, but did he? Day by day I see that boy slipping through my fingers. He never has been of much use to me, and now, when he has reached the age when I could use him, he wants to be a wharf shadow. He won't take the ring to the police. I know him too well for that. When he comes back I'll show him a piece of strategy which he cannot resist."

As for the boy, Dick Sly—Dodger Dick—he was moving down a side street with a good deal of agility.

The new day was fairly on, and the great city was wide awake.

Suddenly Dick darted into a little alley and rung the door-bell of a plain, two-story brick house.

In a moment he was admitted by a young girl who passed him in with a nod of recognition, and the lad darted up-stairs without inquiry.

Rushing into a certain room without knocking, the "wharf rat"—as such boys are commonly denominated—sprung to a bed in one corner and bent over it with a light cry.

"Ah! here you are, Donald! Get up; I've got something to show you!"

The next moment a young man of twenty-two, with clear blue eyes, raised himself on his elbow and looked at Dick.

"You're always finding something, but you never find much," he laughed.

"How is this?" and the boy produced the ring. "Mother Sturgeon calls it shoddy, but what does the future editor of a great newspaper say?"

In an instant the eyes of the young man, a newspaper reporter, got a rich sparkle.

He held out one hand for the ring and Dick surrendered it.

"It is a genuine stone," the reporter said. "I never saw one of its size so brilliant. And a lady's ring, too! In Fortune's name, Dick, where did you get it?"

Then followed the story of the finding, and with it a mention of the three persons who had taken the boat out before midnight.

"What a splendid chance to work up a sensation," the young reporter was impelled to exclaim.

"But you don't want to, Donald," protested Dick. "See here! I want to try my hand on

this case. It is the first real mystery that has dropped into my lap."

"It may be the easiest thing in the world to clear up. The ring may have been in the boat for weeks. Who knows?"

"I propose to know!" declared the boy. "Only you keep it out of the papers, and lend me your head when I want to use it."

"I'll do it, Richard the Dodger."

"I knew I could bank on you, Donald. Mebbe my hunt will secure a better ring than this for Rosa's wedding finger!"

The young reporter colored deeply.

CHAPTER II.

IS IT A TRAP?

DONALD DUSTIN was attached to a morning paper.

He was a young reporter with a good deal of natural shrewdness, and was always on the lookout for items.

It was during one of his visits to the docks in search of something for his paper that he first encountered Dick Sly, who passed much of his time in the domain of the wharf rats.

Dick was discovered cuddled up among a lot of bales waiting for shipment, and from their first acquaintance a strong friendship sprung up between the pair.

More than once had Dick supplied the reporter with timely items, and once or twice had put him on the trail of a dock sensation which had helped Donald in the graces of his employers.

Donald had discovered the relationship existing between Dick and Hannah, or "Mother" Sturgeon.

The woman was the boy's guardian, or so pretended to be, though she did not exercise much care over him. She explained that Dick's mother, Mrs. Sly, in dying, had left the boy to her to bring up as she saw fit—a story which the young dock detective rejected for several good reasons.

While Mother Sturgeon was not a bad woman, as the eyes of the law saw her, Dick did not like certain things he saw about the tenement, and his observations alienated him from his guardian, and sent him to the free and somewhat hazardous life he led around the water-front.

He seemed to know by name the hundreds of strange people who lived by hook and crook under as well as on the wharves and piers.

More than once he had penetrated to the dens of the river thieves, those dark, dismal places beneath or at the inner end of the piers. He could go anywhere, and so well did he cover his tracks, that the wharf rats never suspected that he might be, what he sometimes was, a police spy.

It was the night after the finding of the diamond ring that Dodger Dick entered Mother Sturgeon's abode, the first time since we last saw him there.

As he entered the woman threw a quick glance toward a small door which opened into a wardrobe, but she instantly turned upon the boy.

"Well, Dickey, you turn up very seldom of late," she called out, in a pleasant tone. "I have been waiting for you to come home to tell you that a gentleman has been here to see you."

"What sort of a gentleman?" asked Dick.

"A real nice-looking man he was, looked like he might own a block on Broad street, or some good lots on Broadway."

"Are you real sure he wanted to see me?"

"He said so."

"Did he leave a card?"

"He sat down at the table there and wrote you a note."

"Well, let's have it."

Mother Sturgeon went to a small clock that adorned a mantle over the mock fireplace and fished a bit of folded paper from behind it. This she gave to the boy.

"He is a gentleman sure enough!" decided Dick, when he saw that the back of the paper bore the inscription, "Richard Sly, Esq.," a title of courtesy which had never been bestowed upon him before. Esquire! That was immense!

"That's what I've said," remarked Mrs. Sturgeon, and then she began to watch the lad who was reading the letter, which ran as follows:

"RICHARD SLY, Esq.:

"MY DEAR SIR:—When you receive this, no matter at what hour, I wish you would at once repair to my office, right-hand door, second floor, No. — Beekman street. I have a matter of business on hand which I desire to intrust to a shrewd person of your age. The directions given above will enable you to find me at any hour, day or night. Please consider this important and confidential, and come at once to No. — Beekman."

"Very truly yours,

"SILAS SELDON, JR."

"When did he leave this?" asked Dick, looking

up suddenly, to find Mother Sturgeon regarding him with a good deal of curiosity.

"Just after dinner to-day," was the reply.

"Then it has been delivered in good time."

"I have carried out the gentleman's wishes. He wanted you to get the note as soon as you came home. Is it very important, Dickey?"

"He calls it so, at any rate," equivocally replied the boy.

"You are going to see him?"

"Yes, I s'pose so," carelessly.

Mrs. Sturgeon took a step toward Dick and slightly lowered her voice.

"What have you done with the—I mean the ring you found in the boat?"

"Maybe I've found the owner," ventured the wharf spy. "What would you say if I told you that I had returned it to a rich lady in Madison Square, who had given me ten dollars for my honesty and luck?"

Mother Sturgeon started. "I would say that I ought to have three dollars of it for the rent which is now past due," she answered.

"Well, here's the three dollars," and Dick produced three bright silver dollars which he extended toward his adopted mother.

This unexpected promptness seemed to give Mother Sturgeon a back set.

"Do you really mean to say that the rich lady of Madison Square is no myth?" she demanded.

"Why should she be? The ladies of Five Points don't wear diamond rings, I guess."

"But you haven't found the owner. You have the ring yet?"

Dick made no reply, but kept the money before the woman's eyes until she took it, saying that it should go to liquidate a debt to the landlord.

"Well, I'll see Mr. Silas Seldon," announced Dick.

"To-night?"

"The letter says at once, and that means immediately, don't it?" laughed the lad, and the next moment he bade Mrs. Sturgeon good-night and vanished.

He had hardly reached the bottom of the stair when the woman sprung toward the wardrobe, but before she could reach the door it was opened by some person on the inside, and a man stood before her!

He was a rather fine-looking person of five and forty, well dressed, and somewhat dandified, as his heavy black mustache was waxed to needle-like points at the ends.

"You heard what he said?" exclaimed Mother Sturgeon.

"Every word."

"Well?"

"He hasn't found an owner for the ring any more than I have! He's got it yet. But I can't remain here while is going down to the office. I've got to be there when he comes."

"But you can't head him off."

"I can, and will!" cried the man positively. "I guess I know all the short cuts in this city. He was hoodwinking you when he talked about the Madison Square woman."

"I thought so."

"Well, he won't hoodwink me!"

The man moved toward the door.

"I don't wan't you to hurt Dick," cried Mother Sturgeon, springing forward and catching his arm as he reached the door.

"Pshaw! who said I intended to?" he exclaimed, looking down into her half-frightened face. "I know how to deal with all kinds of people. Dick may think himself shrewd, and he may be around the docks, but he can't play against a gentleman. Have no fears, Mother Sturgeon."

The man gave the woman no chance to reply; he was gone before she could speak more.

"I don't like to see a fellow pile it on like he's done," murmured Dick Sly, as he was covering the distance between Mrs. Sturgeon's and the house on Beekman street. "I haven't the slightest idea who Silas Seldon is, but his invitation coming at this time sets me to thinking. I found a valuable ring in an abandoned boat just before day—a lady's ring at that. That boat was found bottom up in the harbor by Old Fix, of the water patrol. I saw the boat go out and come back. Nothing of value came back in it but the lady's diamond ring. Donald has agreed to keep the mystery out of the papers, and I may be able to give him something new about 'the ring puzzle,' as he calls it, to-morrow."

Dick did not walk very fast, and considerable time had elapsed when he found the number designated in the singular letter.

Going boldly into the open hallway, the wharf spy ran up the steps and easily found the first door to the right on the second floor.

A mellow light beyond the half-open transom told Dick that somebody awaited him, and when he rapped lightly he was admitted by a man with a full black beard that covered his face almost to his eyes.

The door was shut behind him, and Dick was invited to a chair, which he took, and looked at the man sharply.

"Where have I seen those eyes before?" mentally asked Dick. "If this is Silas Seldon, Jr., I have walked into the net of a sharper."

Then he waited for the man to speak. "I presume you are Richard Sly?" he suddenly asked.

"Dick Sly, or Dodger Dick, as you prefer," responded the boy.

The man did not take any notice of the emphasis.

"Then you got my letter. Your presence here tells me this."

"I got it," quietly.

"Well, Richard, I understand that you spend a good deal of your time on the docks and piers."

"I am there, sometimes."

"Yes. I have learned enough to know that you see much that occurs along the rivers, particularly after night."

The dock spy made no reply.

"I want you to help me in a little matter which I do not want to put into the hands of the police just yet for certain reasons. A few nights ago a relation of mine was very mysteriously robbed of a number of pieces of jewelry. I will give you the particulars a little further on. I have reasons for believing that the plunderers left one of the pieces in a boat, and, as you frequent them so much, I have called your shrewdness to my assistance. A very heavy reward will be paid for a certain piece of the stolen jewelry, a keepsake in the shape of a lady's ring, plain gold, with a solitaire diamond set."

Dick started slightly as the man paused; he could not help it.

"Aha! I see the scheme!" he said to himself. "And the man's smile has betrayed him. It is Jack o' Diamonds!"

CHAPTER III.

GETTING OUT OF THE SNARE.

THE boy did not let on that he had recognized the man who had inveigled him into the snare. It would have been dangerous for him to have done so.

The man's smile had betrayed him, and now Dodger Dick knew him as Jack o' Diamonds, a person to be feared and watched.

"I must get out of this trap," decided the boy. "I must do it, too, if possible without exciting Jack's suspicions. Can I accomplish it?" and then he went to work.

"I don't know as I can help you any, Mr. Seldon," he said, to the man. "But I am at your service. You say a valuable ring has been lost?"

"Valuable mainly as a keepsake, an' heirloom," replied the man, quickly. "I am acting for the lady who lost the jewelry. She is averse to putting the case into the hands of the regular police or of any detective agency, but prefers to work quietly. You understand these things, Richard?"

Dick nodded, at which Silas Seldon, Jr., looked disappointed. He expected to see the boy produce the ring at mention of the reward offered for it but the lad made no efforts in that direction.

The man knew he had found the ring for he had come from Mrs. Sturgeon's house to the Beckman street office, beating Dick to the latter place by fast walking.

Mother Sturgeon, never famous for holding her tongue, had given him some very important information, and the shrewdest "crook" in Gotham was acting upon it, playing against a boy, who, fortunately for the boy, in acumen was nearly his match.

Suddenly the man moved his chair toward Dick and the next moment had laid his hand on his arm.

"I am authorized to pay two hundred dollars for the ring," he announced, looking into the boy's face. "Think of it, Richard; two hundred dollars. Why, that sum would make a Vanderbilt out of you!"

"A Vanderbilt on a very small scale, Mr. Seldon!" laughed Dick, drawing gently back. "You will admit that I have no clew to work on. You don't expect me to pick up the ring on the docks, do you?"

"Not that, but I am confident that it is in your power to delight the lady, my employer."

Dick looked at the man.

Did he mean that he knew where the ring was? Did Jack o' Diamonds know who had found the diamond ring, and where it had been found?

"I will try," answered Dick. "A plain gold ring, with a solitary diamond, you say? When was it lost?"

Instead of replying, the man leaned back in his chair and gazed at the Dodger.

"There's no use in playing about the bush," he suddenly said, his whole manner changing in an instant and his eyes getting a flash. "We happen to know that a ring answering the description has been picked up. We know, too, that it was found by a boy who lives with a widow lady on Greenwich street. What do you say, Richard?"

The eyes of the disguised crook were fastened on the boy, and he looked ready to dart forward and seize him at the first movement on his part.

"The crisis has come!" decided Dick. "But Jack o' Diamonds can't get anything out of me. I'll play a right bower to his left, or my name isn't Richard Sly."

"If you know all this, why have you sent for me?" asked the young wharf spy. "Why don't you lay your hands on the Greenwich street boy if he has the lost ring?"

"I'll do it now!" was the instant retort, and before Dick could stir, the man sprung forward and fastened his arm in a grip of steel. "You know the Greenwich street boy as well as I do; you are he! Now, Richard, where is the ring?"

Dick's first response was a spring upward, despite the grasping hand.

His movement was so sudden, and was executed with such force, that he succeeded in leaving the chair, and broke entirely from the crook's grip.

"No foolishness, my wharf ferret!" grated Jack o' Diamonds, planting himself between Dick and the door. "You don't get out o' here until you give up the ring which fell into your hands last night. It is known that you picked it up. Come; let me have it!"

Dick Sly faced the man and saw plainer than ever the features of the New York crook.

"What if I don't happen to have the ring?" he asked.

"But you have! you carry it on your person!"

"You are very positive, Mr. Seldon," said Dick, still keeping the rascal to the belief that the dock detective did not know his true character.

"I have a right to be positive. I know what I know! We don't want to parley here all night. Give me the ring!"

He advanced toward Dick as he uttered the last demand, but the boy did not recoil.

"Here; search me!" he exclaimed, holding up his hands. "If you find a ring about me it is yours. Go ahead now. As I told you awhile ago, I am at your service."

Jack o' Diamonds did not know what to say. The apparent willingness of the boy to be searched had taken him by surprise.

What did it mean?

"Aren't you going to search me?" the Dodger asked. "I don't want to leave here, Mr. Seldon, making you believe that I have deceived you."

The next moment Dick was clutched by the disguised crook and thrust into a chair. Then his pockets were submitted to a close inspection, and the eager hands of the man subjected him to slight indignities.

Dick endured it all with a quiet twinkle in his expressive eyes. He did not murmur once during the search, which was thorough enough, and occupied some minutes.

"What do you say now?" asked Dick, looking triumphantly into the man's face as he concluded the search. "I told you beforehand that you would not find the ring. If I found it maybe I've made myself a young Vanderbilt by selling it."

"No, you have not done that!" was the quick retort, and then the crook's eyes seemed to soften.

"You will excuse the rudeness to which I have subjected you. My employer wants the ring soon. Her daughter is to be married, and the ring must grace her hand during the ceremony."

"Ho! that is the reason for all this haste, is it?"

"Yes; I happen to know, to a certainty, that you found the ring. I am acting under orders that don't permit any ceremony. Don't you know that you can't sell the ring without exciting suspicion and causing your arrest? What would a lapidary or a pawnbroker say to

a boy who offered for sale a diamond ring? You know, Richard. You haven't slept on the docks and piers and lived among the wharf vermin for nothing. Come! let us understand one another. Is the lady to have her property?"

"Maybe I'd sooner treat with the lady herself?" remarked Dick, in a bantering way.

"You will treat with *me*, and with no one else!" was the emphatic answer. "I am the authorized middle-man in *this* matter."

"And you will pay two hundred for the ring?"

"Yes."

"Cash?"

"Cash on delivery."

"What I haven't got with me can't be delivered," replied Dick.

"Then, you mean—"

"I mean nothing!" was the interruption. "However, if you convince me that this is a fair deal I might help you."

A scowl darkened the crook's brows and his hands closed madly.

"What more can I say?" he exclaimed, leaning forward. "You want the lady's name. That is what you're holding back for. I see it all plainly. You think you can increase the reward by treating directly with her. She will entertain none of *your* propositions. I am the right party, I say. What are you going to do?"

Once more the figure of the Gotham crook seemed to hang over the wharf-boy like an impending avalanche. Behind heavy black lashes his eyes foretold the oncoming storm.

"You cannot show me the person who says I found such a ring," suddenly declared Dick.

The words seemed to startle Jack o' Diamonds.

"Tell me who has been playing the spy in my kingdom," he went on. "Ah! you cannot do that, Mr. Seldon! You make certain charges here, yet you cannot substantiate them. I found a ring last night. You say you know this to be true. Why don't you give me a chance to defend myself?"

The crook made no reply, but stood nonplussed before the lad.

He dared not tell him how he had obtained the information; he could not afford to betray Mrs. Sturgeon, Dick's guardian, and so he faced the young shadow like one wholly at his wits' end.

"All this is not answering *my* question!" he suddenly cried. "I have asked you what are you going to do?"

"About the ring?"

"About nothing else!"

"I want a little time to decide," replied Dick.

"You want time to hide it beyond possibility of being found, eh?"

"I did not say so."

"By Jove! I'll give you time," was the startling response. "I'll play fair with you, Richard. I give you until this hour to-morrow night."

Dick Sly could hardly believe his ears. Was he going to walk out of the crook's presence unchecked and unharmed?

"I accept," he answered. "At this hour to-morrow night, *what*?"

"I can be found here if you come alone."

"Ready to pay the reward for the ring if it is produced then?"

"Yes."

"That is fair," asserted the boy, apparently satisfied.

"You must come alone, remember!" admonished the man.

"I understand; alone."

"You will come, eh?"

"If nothing prevents."

Jack o' Diamonds stepped back. He seemed to be satisfied with the compromise.

"I know what it means," concluded Dick. "From now on I am to be watched by the coolest and shrewdest rascal in New York. Jack o' Diamonds is playing a deep game of some kind, and the ring is at the bottom of it. I will do my best, too, and I'll bring Donald to the rescue."

A minute later Dick was on the street again, and he felt that the eyes of the crook were already upon him.

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER DIAMOND RING.

DICK SLY, it happened, was not the only person who thought it singular that the strange boat should be found drifting in the harbor just before dawn.

There was one individual besides the dock ferret who gave the circumstance more than passing thought.

This was Donald Dustin, the young reporter, always on the lookout for a good item, and ever ready to get ahead of his associates on the morning paper.

We have seen Dick rouse him from sleep at his

lodgings shortly after the finding of the ring, and have heard the conference between the two friends.

Donald had given his word that the episode should not get into the paper, but he had given it reluctantly, for he knew it was the destruction of an excellent column sensation.

About the time that Richard Sly was making his way from Mother Sturgeon's to the trap Jack o' Diamonds had set for him, the young reporter knocked at the door of a small house not many squares from the Beekman street snare.

He was admitted by a middle-aged woman who smiled as she recognized him.

"I'm afraid you won't find Rosa at home," said the woman.

"Not at home?" exclaimed Donald, surprised.

"She went away last night and I don't think she has returned. However, you can go up and see. You know the way, Mr. Dustin."

Donald hardly waited to hear the last words, but passed the woman and sprung up-stairs.

In a little while he entered a small room whose furniture was revealed by the light in the outside hall.

"Mrs. Hartwick was right. Rosa is not here!"

The reporter looked puzzled, for the room was without a tenant besides himself; but nothing indicated that its dweller had gone away to stay.

He stood near the door debating what to do when he heard a step behind him and Mrs. Hartwick entered.

"Excuse me, Mr. Dustin," she ejaculated. "I came up to see what has become of Rosa anyhow."

"She is not here," answered the young reporter in disappointed tones. "When did she go away?"

Mrs. Hartwick smiled.

"It is rather strange. Nothing like it ever happened to me before," was the reply. "I don't believe in spirits, Mr. Dustin, but I have dabbled in spiritualism a little, as you know."

"A little with Rosa for amusement. I know all about it. Go on, Mrs. Hartwick."

"Well, last night about seven o'clock I was sitting in my front room when I heard a voice at the window. I heard it very distinctly, for the room happened to be still at the time. Three times the voice pronounced the name of Sarah Simpson, a friend of mine who lives just around the corner. Mrs. Simpson believes in spirit-rappings and all such things, and when I heard her name at my window I almost believed myself. I did not know what to do, but plucking up courage I tip-toed toward the window and asked what was wanted. The only reply I got was, 'Sarah Simpson, Sarah Simpson,' and the name died away slowly with the last pronunciation. It flashed across my mind all at once that Mrs. Simpson needed help in some manner, and I resolved to go to her."

"Rosa was in this room at the time, and not wishing to show her my face, for I was frightened, I slipped off alone. When I found Mrs. Simpson she was in good health and invited me to remain, which I did for two hours. It was after nine o'clock when I got back. There was no light in Rosa's room, and concluding that the girl was tired out and had gone to bed, I retired myself. This morning she did not come down to breakfast, and then I discovered that she was not in the house. Her bed had not been disturbed. It was just as you see it now, Mr. Dustin. That is all I know about Rosa's going away. It is kind of queer, seems to me, that I should be taken off by a mysterious voice at the window and that Rosa should disappear while I was gone."

The reporter was in a deep study when Mrs. Hartwick finished her story.

"Don't you think it is very queer?" she asked.

The question seemed to bring him back to himself.

"There are several elements of mystery about it," he exclaimed. "I cannot account for Rosa's absence. What did you think when you found she was gone?"

"At first I thought she had taken a sudden notion to stay all night with her friend Alice Gray. She does so sometimes, but then I always know that she is going. When that theory was exploded by Alice herself who called for her this morning, I did not know what to think."

"What do your neighbors say?"

"None of them saw Rosa go. I have asked all but a young man who clerks in a store in Baxter street."

"A Jew?" asked Donald.

"No; a young American named Larry Lang. He and I haven't been on very good terms for some time, and I concluded I wouldn't trouble him about Rosa's going away."

"Did Rosa know him?"

"Yes, and despised him, too. Didn't she tell you, Mr. Dustin, how he used to persecute her with his attentions?"

"Never! the infamous rascal!" ejaculated Donald coloring. "But that must have been some time ago, Mrs. Hartwick?"

"Only last spring. I presume she didn't want to bother you about such affairs, and then she used to say that she could manage such fellows like Larry Lang."

"Where does he clerk?" asked the young reporter his eyes sparkling with resentment.

"He is with Solomon Strauss."

"And I know exactly where to find Solomon!" exclaimed Donald. "I once had a reportorial experience with that oily Baxter-street sharp. I am sorry that Rosa is not here."

"Is that all, Mr. Dustin?" she exclaimed.

"Aren't you alarmed?"

"Not much, Mrs. Hartwick. Rosa is too sensible a girl to keep us in suspense long."

"What do you think?"

"Oh, she has taken a sudden journey to another part of the city," answered Donald, though his voice told that he was far from being at his ease.

"She has not deserted me, I hope?" cried the woman.

"Of course not. See! she has left all her goods behind. She will come back shortly. But let me ask you, Mrs. Hartwick, when did you last see Larry Lang?"

"Not since yesterday."

"He boards next door?"

"Yes."

"That is all," answered Donald, and the next minute with a final look about the room he went away, bidding Mrs. Hartwick good-night.

"Here is a mystery about as deep as that which clings to the diamond ring," he exclaimed to himself when he reached the street already lit up and thronging with people. "I don't believe Rosa would go off in this manner of her own accord. I am puzzled, and can't help associating her disappearance with the strange voice Mrs. Hartwick heard at her window last night. As for Larry Lang, I will investigate him first. This is one of the things Rosa has kept from me. I see that she did not want to draw me into a difficulty with any one."

Meantime the young reporter was hurrying toward Baxter street. He knew that Solomon Strauss closed earlier than some of his neighbors, and he was anxious to catch Mr. Lang at his post.

There was a short cut to the clothing store and Donald took it.

After a brisk walk he reached the place and found it still open. It stood in the midst of the Jewish quarter, and on every side were the symbols of the trade which has made Baxter street famous the world over.

At that particular hour Solomon Strauss, an angular Jew, with a very hooked beak, had no customer.

He stood near the door of his establishment, leaning against a pile of goods, and seemed to be counting in his mind the profits of the day.

Donald's sudden appearance gave Solomon's eyes an avaricious sparkle, and he pounced upon the supposed customer with Jewish avidity.

But all at once he seemed to recognize his visitor, for he drew back with a flashing look and became a statue of suppressed rage.

"Where is Mr. Lang?" asked Donald, who secretly enjoyed the Israelite's mood.

"I haf no dealings mit a man like you!" cried Solomon. "You ish dot smart young man vat come here after my fire, an' put me in der babers mit unshentlemanly remarks of your own! You ish dot reborter who brint dot der stuff vot vas burned up den vas all old an' unsalable trash. I could shake you at dot time!" and Solomon Strauss looked like he wanted to do it then.

"I'm not here to call up that little episode," said Donald. "I want to see Mr. Lang."

"Vell, Mister Lang isn't in!"

"Gone for the night, eh?"

"Mister Lang has left my employ."

The young reporter started.

"When did he leave?"

"I settled mit him yesterday. I haf advertised for a new clerk. Vat you vant mit Mister Lang, hey?"

"I wanted to see him on business."

"Mebbe you'll find him at his poardin'-house, an' mebbe not," snapped Solomon. "Ain't you ashamed o' dot report you published about my fire dot time, eh? Der custom you ruined for me almost sent me to der almshouse."

Donald discovered that the Jew merchant was determined to go back to his fire, and believing that he could get no information from him concerning the ex-clerk's present whereabouts, he began to withdraw.

"Dot young man never comes back to me!" suddenly cried Mr. Strauss.

"Why not?"

"Veeping Rachel! he spends money like water!" was the reply. "Every night he puts his money on der cards, an' talks play mit der customers in der store. Mebbe it was not all his money dot he spend. Vat you think, Mister Dustin, hey?"

"Why didn't you find out, Mr. Strauss?"

"Ven I only find out day before yesterday apout his habits? Ven I begin to talk he asks for a settlement, an' we quit. He buys studs, diamond rings an' all dot stuff on twenty dollar a month! Only yesterday I see on his finger a lady's gold ring mit a blazin' diamond in it. I thought it was paste, but I now know dot it cost dot young rascal two hundred dollar."

Donald did not wait to hear more from Solomon Strauss. A strange thought, or a comparison, flashed across his mind as he hastily bade the Jew good-night.

Dick says that one of the three persons who took the boat last night was a woman, and Larry Lang when he left wore a lady's diamond ring!" murmured the young reporter.

CHAPTER V.

DONALD AND DICK.

A STARTLING revelation seemed to burst upon Donald's mind as he walked from the store of the Baxter street shark.

Were there two diamond rings enveloped in mystery, or but one?

The question puzzled the young reporter while he pushed down the street.

Suddenly wheeling about he began to walk rapidly in another direction.

When he came to a halt he was at the foot of the stair leading up into Mother Sturgeon's quarters, on Greenwich street, and a little later he stood before Dick's self-constituted guardian.

Donald was on hunt of the young wharf spy, but Mrs. Sturgeon told him that Dick was not at home, and added in the same breath that she did not know where he could be found.

The reporter did not disclose his business with the boy, though Mrs. Sturgeon threw out several hints for it, and he soon left the woman to herself again.

By this time Donald had associated Rosa's strange disappearance with Larry Lang, and when he thought that the girl, his best friend, had fallen into a trap spread by the young rascal, his indignation almost mastered him.

Dick Sly had found a diamond ring in a boat which had been picked up adrift by the harbor police, and only the day before Larry had sported a ring that answered the description of the one found.

He had not pressed Dick for a close description of the parties who had taken the boat from the dock earlier in the night. If he had he would have been poorly rewarded, for the boy from his bed on the baled goods did not recognize them.

However, Donald was very anxious to find Dick, and thinking to do so soon he went from Mother Sturgeon's to the docks.

It was now past the time that witnessed Dick's interview with Jack o' Diamonds in the office on Beekman street.

The night was warm and beautiful, and the arching heavens were studded with stars.

Nobody recognized the busy young reporter as he pushed along, but he saw several faces which he had seen before in the police courts.

"Hello!" suddenly exclaimed a voice at his elbow, and the next moment he was looking into the face of the very person he wanted to find, Dick Sly.

Donald gave utterance to an exclamation of joy.

"Look over your right shoulder at the two figures in the shadow of the boxes," whispered Dick, as he touched the reporter's hand significantly.

Donald looked and saw the figures without trouble.

"Well, what of them, Dick?" he asked.

"They are two distinguished gentleman who should reside in Sing Sing," was the reply.

"Ah! you know them!"

"Yes. I have just had an interview with the fellow nearest us. He calls himself Silas Seldon, Jr., but I saw in his head the eyes of the famous Jack o' Diamonds."

The reporter could hardly suppress a cry.

"He is no one else," continued the Wharf Spy Detective, casting a covert glance at the two men who did not seem to be paying the slightest attention to them. "His pal is Red Reynard, a fellow not so shrewd as Jack o' Diamonds, but a man well known to the police. Red is the man who cleverly outwitted my old friend Frederick Fix a year or so ago."

"Are they watching us, Dick?" whispered Donald.

"They are doing nothing else," was the reply.

"They have followed me for the last half hour, Jack o' Diamonds alone at first, then in company with Red Reynard. Let us move on a piece."

The two friends walked up the wharf and after a time the crooks left their station and did the same.

"It is plain now!" ejaculated the young reporter. "What is their game, Richard?"

The boy spotter smiled.

"They want to get ahead of Dick Sly!" he exclaimed, his brilliant eyes in a twinkle. "Jack o' Diamonds is very anxious to recover a ring that was found in a boat last night."

"The diamond ring?" cried Donald.

"Yes."

"It is on account of that ring, or another, that I've been hunting you. Rosa has mysteriously disappeared."

"Not our Rosa?" cried Dick almost loud enough to be heard by the two men not far away.

"Our friend Rosa," answered the reporter. "She left Mrs. Hartwick's last night while the widow was at a friend's, having been called away by an alarm of strange voices at the window. I have discovered several things connected with Rosa, but nothing that gives me a clew to her absence."

"What have you discovered, Donald?" asked the boy quickly. "Go on."

"She was once persecuted with the attentions of one Larry Lang, a young fellow who clerked for Solomon Strauss of Baxter street. I think Rosa's rejection of his attentions angered him. Well, yesterday Larry quit the employ of the Jew merchant. Solomon discovered that the young man was spending too much money on diamonds for the counter salary he was drawing, and so they dissolved."

"He gave Larry the grand bounce, did he?" cried Dick.

"That is about it. Larry was not at his boarding-house all day yesterday. During the day he wore a ring like the one you found in the boat. You have never seen Solomon's discharged clerk, I presume."

"I know him quite well!" exclaimed Dick to Donald's surprise. "If I had known he was in Solomon Strauss's employ, I could have warned the Baxter street shark long ago."

"How so?"

"Near here is a place Larry used to patronize. Everybody has free entrance, and I drifted into it as a matter of course. We call it Hawk's Hollow, because it is a trap set back a little from the main buildings. Some people have queer tastes, and hither Larry Lang in his good clothes used to come and get rid of somebody's money. He could play here without being found out by his employer, for no Jews patronized Hawk's Hollow; at least I never saw any there. Shall we go up? We might find Larry there."

Donald assented to the proposition, but not with much hope of finding the discharged clerk.

Once more he threw a look over his shoulder in search of Jack o' Diamonds and his friend.

They were not in sight.

"Our night-hawks have given up the game!" he exclaimed, returning to the boy.

"By no means," was the quick response. "I see the top of Jack's hat over the bales yonder, and you may be sure that the keenest eyes in New York are under it, and wide awake, too. They won't follow us into Hawk's Hollow, for they do not want to be inspected in the light.

Jack thinks I am going to lead him to the ring found in the boat. Ha! what a fool the fellow is for once! He tried to fill me with an adroit story about a recent robbery, and wanted me to believe that the diamond ring, if produced, put into his hands, you know, would enrich me by two hundred dollars. Something is up when Jack o' Diamonds wants to give that sum of money for the prize I fished from the abandoned boat. And nobody knows that better than wharf rat Dick Sly!"

Several minutes later the young ferret led Donald into a frame house which stood a little back of its neighbors.

The hallway was dark at first, but soon light was produced by the opening of a door some distance ahead. The figure of a man advanced toward the pair, and then Dick exclaimed, "Is that you, Spotty?" the man stopped and welcomed the friends.

Dick and Donald passed into a room half-filled with smoke.

There were half a dozen tables in the place, and at each one men of all ages were drinking and indulging in coarse conversation.

"This is not Larry's quarters," whispered Dick, with a glance at Donald, and the two went upstairs and entered a room where one table accommodated all the players.

"Ho! here is the king of the wharf rats!" called out a burly man, at sight of Dick.

"I am here, Goldenrod," laughed the boy, and then as the man's eyes dropped to the game before him, the young detective said to Donald:

"That is Goldenrod, the man who never frowns. He is always in a good-humor. He covered me with his coat one night when I was asleep on the docks, and since then Goldenrod and I have been friends."

"He looks jovial," remarked Donald. "May be he knows something about Larry."

"We will see," cried the boy, and the next moment he leaned over the burly man's shoulder and talked in low tones.

"What has become o' Larry?" he asked.

"Oh, the Baxter street prince? He's given us the good-by! He will never come back any more."

"Why not, Goldenrod?"

"I don't know. He acted kind o' mysterious. He dropped in here yesterday, and singled me out to say that he was about to leave New York, that he had tapped a fortune which would in time fetch him the wealth o' Vanderbilt. He talked about going to Europe—"

"To Europe!—Larry?" ejaculated Dick.

"Across the pond. He wanted to sell me a diamond ring he wore, just as if I owned a bank in Broad street."

"Did you examine the ring, Goldenrod?"

"He forced me to do so."

"Then you would know it?"

"Among a thousand!" cried the man, confidently. "But why all this, Dick! Did the fellow get the ring off on you?"

"I know where it is," replied the boy, sinking his voice to the lowest whisper. "When can you get away from here?"

"At any time if you want me."

"Then join me on the pier within twenty minutes. I will have a friend with me, my old friend Donald, the reporter. Something important is in the wind, Goldenrod."

"I'll be there," replied the jolly man, as he went back to the game, and Dick withdrew.

"Come," he said to Donald as he rejoined him.

"We'll have a clew in a little while."

The two friends left the house, and as they emerged upon the dock a certain hand closed on a certain arm.

"Yonder they go, Red!" exclaimed a voice in a whisper. "That young wharf rat is the pest of the scheme. Watch him! don't let him give us the slip. By Jupiter! I could throw him to the fishes with a laugh!"

CHAPTER VI.

A DOCK-RATS' "NEST."

It was the night after the events with which we have just closed the foregoing chapter.

The hour was verging on to twelve when a boat ran noiseless up to one of the docks of New York. It contained two men, but only one handled the pliant oars.

"This is the place, Red," said one of the men to his companion as the boat ran in between two piers where the waters made no noise. "Wait for me here, or come back in an hour."

The speaker left the boat and drew his body up into a dark opening almost on a level with the surface of the gloomy water.

When he disappeared the person remaining in the boat rested awhile, and then put back, to be lost in a little time to human eyes.

Let us follow the man who has crawled into the wharf rats' retreat.

He was a person very like in figure to the man who had insnared Dick Sly in the Beekman street office, only, instead of a full beard as that person wore, he sported a heavy mustache which entirely hid his mouth.

The man seemed to be at home in the dark space between the heavy timbers that formed the pier.

He had to crawl on his hands and knees for a

considerable distance, hearing now and then the contests of the huge rats that fought for mastery in the darkness.

Once in a while he would hear a weird laugh, some snatches of a song, or some curses; but they seemed to come from far away.

It was a dismal place.

At last the persistent crawler reached the rim of a ghostly light, and then he came upon several wild-looking figures seated in the gloomy smiles of a lantern hanging from a peg.

A nest of wharf rats!

The visitor was not seen until he was upon the group, and an exclamation of recognition announced him.

"You don't come often any more," cried one of the group, a youth of seventeen or eighteen with deep, half-famished eyes, and in ragged clothes. "There used to be a time when you weren't above us wharf rats, Jack o' Diamonds; but now, since you're able to strut about in good gear, you keep aloof, or come only when—

"Give Jack a chance, Bender," interrupted one of the others, clutching the speaker's arm with a lot of scrawny fingers. "Whenever he comes he fetches work, an' you'll spoil it all by growling too soon mebbe."

"Let Bender growl, Tony Whack," laughed Jack o' Diamonds. "He's never himself when he isn't growling over some imaginary bone. How's times, boys?"

"Not very brisk," answered the one called Tony. "Somebody bored into a lot o' sugar on the pier last night, an' the cops have their peepers open for us."

"How does Prince Peter come on?" asked Jack.

"Here he is! He can speak for himself," was the reply and then the crook saw a pale thin face in the lamplight.

It was the face of a little boy not more than thirteen. The skin was drawn tightly over the bones, like the skin of a starved person, and the boy looked ten years older than he was.

His eyes, unnaturally bright, shone like diamonds.

It was easily seen that this child was a cripple; his lower limbs lay helpless on the ground, but he supported the upper part of his body on his hands while he looked at Jack.

"Here you are, sure enough!" ejaculated the New York crook, turning to the boy. "How do you come on, Prince Peter?"

"As always, Jack," was the answer as the boy's face seemed to brighten, but with a strange sadness to which his companions were accustomed. "Last night I saw the bright stars again. I crept from the nest to the water, and there I fell asleep looking at them."

Jack o' Diamonds gave Tony Whack and Bender a glance of rebuke.

"We couldn't help it," quickly put in Tony. "Bender an' I were off on a little lark, and Prince Peter was asleep. When we came back we found him at the front, safe an' sound. Nobody had seen him, though."

"Nobody but the good man in the sky," said the cripple. "I never saw the store so bright before. Just over where I lay was a big bright fellow that looked like the big gold pieces I used to see before I came here to live."

"You've always lived here, Prince Peter," cried Tony Whack, throwing the cripple a glance not very pleasant.

The little boy seemed to recoil.

"Always, Tony?" he asked.

"Why, of course. The docks o' New York have always been my home an' yours, too. They're good enough for me, don't they suit you, Bender?"

Bender, the largest of the three wharf rats, confirmed Tony Whack's opinion, and poor little Prince Peter remained silent.

By-and-by Jack o' Diamonds and the two larger boys exchanged meanful looks and withdrew, leaving the cripple to go back to the bunk he had left at sound of the crook's voice.

"Boys, when did you see slick Dick Sly last?" asked Jack o' Diamonds of the two wharf rats, as they drew up to him some distance from the strange encampment.

"I haven't seen him for several days," answered Bender after brief thought.

"I saw him to-day," said Tony Whack.

Jack wheeled upon Tony with a question on his lips.

"Where was he, Tony?"

"On the next dock."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"What was he doing?"

"Seemed to be strolling' about for his health."

"That's not what you told me, Tony!" ejaculated Bender snappishly.

"I want the truth," remarked the crook sternly, his eyes catching a fierce gleam as he turned upon the boy. "Dick was doing something when you saw him?"

"Not much after all. He stopped walkin' after awhile and made some marks on a big box with a nail."

"Where is the box?" asked the crook quickly.

"Oh, a dray took it off this afternoon."

"But you saw what the boy drew didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Hang me, Jack, if it wasn't the picture of a section of wharf-ratdom!" cried Tony. "He drew it from memory too, with all the cross ways, the nests—the whole thing complete! I never saw anything like it. I recognized it as soon as I clapped my peepers onto the wood."

Jack o' Diamonds clinched his hands.

"You mean that Dick Sly drew a diagram of the ward you occupy?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"Don't you know," and Jack lowered his voice, "that Dick Sly sometimes pipes for the cops?"

"We've heard you say so, Jack."

"Well, it's not to my interest to lie about it," scowled the crook. "Now, what if I should get him to pay a visit to, say—to 'the chapel' to-morrow? He's been there before, you know."

"We've seen him among the rats there."

"Dick Sly was freshening his memory when he drew on the box," continued Jack. "One o' these days the harbor cops will enter your ward, and there'll be merry sport. Think of the stuff they'll find! It won't be an arrest for boring into sugar hogsheads."

"Heavens! it'll be for something worse!" cried Bender.

"I should say so!" ejaculated Jack o' Diamonds, with a grin. "You can't afford to have Dick Sly, the wharf rat shadow, carrying a diagram of the planting-ground in his head. You can't afford to have him find Prince Peter asleep in the starlight."

"Neither can you, Jack!" exclaimed Tony Whack. "When I saw what Dodger Dick had sketched on the box, I cut it all to pieces with my knife."

"A capital idea that was!" cried Jack; "but that is not safety, not by any means. See here! I can get Dick to 'the chapel' to-morrow."

"By a decoy?" asked the two boys in a breath.

"I'll get him there!" was the response.

A moment's silence followed.

"He will come without suspecting anything foul," the crook went on. "Just now the young rat is on a trail that will give all of us a peck o' trouble if he isn't trapped. He knows the dock paradise of New York pretty well, but there are a few secrets connected with it which have never been revealed to him."

"And 'the chapel' is one of them, Jack!" cried Tony.

"It must remain a secret to him," was the reply. "To-morrow, at three o'clock in the afternoon, the Dodger, Dick Sly, the wharf spy of the cops, will be in 'the chapel!' You two will work together. Now, about Prince Peter. He doesn't want to play astronomer on his own hook any more. One o' these days, if it suits me, he will see all the stars he likes; but until then he doesn't want to study the heavens from the dock. Remember! Prince Peter must be kept at home!"

Five minutes later the council under the wharf broke up, and when Jack o' Diamonds went back to "the nest" he found the little cripple lying at the edge of the light fast asleep, with a sad, sweet smile on his pinched face!

"Worth more than his weight in gold if I can pull the right string," mentally ejaculated the Gotham crook. "I've got a trap set for the secret young copper now. He did give us the slip last night, and Red's to blame for it. But to-morrow, under busy an' roaring New York, there'll be sprung a trap that'll forever fix the wharf rat shadow. Larry's got a wife ere this, I suspect, an' it's time for Jack o' Diamonds to pull the golden cord."

CHAPTER VII.

FOUND AND LOST.

GOLDENROD, the jolly frequenter of Hawk's Hollow, had but to glance at the ring which Dick Sly had picked up in the boat to recognize it as the one he had lately seen on Larry Lang's finger.

"This solves a part of the mystery!" exclaimed Donald, the young reporter. "The young rascal has played a deep game against Rosa. What say you, Richard?"

The eyes of the Wharf Spy Detective already possessed a gleam which partly confirmed Donald's suspicions.

"I am afraid," he said, mildly, "that the woman who went out in the boat with the two men was Rosa. I cannot say, however, that she went unwillingly."

"You don't mean to say that she would go freely with a fellow like Solomon Strauss's dishonest clerk?" exclaimed Donald, flushing.

"Not that, Donald. But some cool, deep games are nightly played in Gotham."

"I know that. Woe to Larry Lang if he has made Rosa the victim of any of his schemes! What is your first move, Dick?"

"We must find the water trail to a certainty," was the reply. "Give me till to-morrow night."

"So long?" ejaculated the impatient reporter.

"It will not be long if we make any discoveries."

The boy's proposition was agreed to, and the little council which had outwitted Jack o' Diamonds and Red Reynard on the docks, broke up for the night.

On the night following and some time prior to the hour of the crook's visit to the wharf rats' nest, Donald and Dick came together at an appointed rendezvous.

The reporter had used his wits during the day, but did not have much to report.

He had visited Mrs. Hartwick only to learn that Rosa had not returned.

The good woman was nearly distracted over her boarder's absence, and it was with difficulty that Donald could persuade her from lodging information with the police.

"What have you discovered, Dick?" asked the young reporter eagerly, when he had told his brief story.

"I've picked up one or two threads that may have a bearing on the case," was the reply. "I've been all over town, and with 'a nose for news,' as you newspaper fellows say. In the first place, Larry Lang is putting on airs in an up-town hotel."

Donald uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"I had the pleasure of watching the fellow for half an hour. He seems as happy as a clam in his shell at high tide. If I had not looked twice I would not have known him."

"Where is the rascal?" cried Donald, clinching his hands.

"Wait till I'm through," smiled Dick. "I don't want you to go up there and spoil the handsomest face in Gotham. We can afford to let Larry enjoy himself for the present. While I was watching him, a man came up and took him away. The man was my old friend, Silas Seldon, Jr., of Beekman street."

"In other words, Jack o' Diamonds!"

The boy nodded, with a smile.

"They went into one corner of the billiard-room, and sat with their backs near an open window. In a little while I was on the sidewalk under that same window, and my ears picked up a word now and then, though the two scamps talked in confidential tones."

"And you heard what?"

"Enough to know that Rosa took a boat-ride the other night," was the reply.

"With those two men?"

"Yes."

Donald's hands met suddenly, and his bright eyes got an indignant flash.

"Those fellows are playing a double game," the boy went on. "Jack o' Diamonds is helping Larry for help in return. He told the young clerk that he would recover the ring and 'fix things' in that direction, while Larry makes a move to-morrow."

"What kind of a move?" asked Donald.

"That is what puzzles me," answered the Dodger. "At this juncture their voices sunk lower, and I could only catch the name of a man."

"Whose name was it, Dick?"

"Peter Prayne."

"Why, that is the name of the merchant who lost a child, mysteriously some years ago."

"So it is. I'll never forget that, for the case interested me, and started me on the lookout for men and things."

"The merchant has been bothered almost to death since that time. Rascals of all kinds have bled him. Do Jack o' Diamonds and Larry intend to play a game of this blackmailing sort?"

"They intend to play some sort of a hand to-morrow. At ten o'clock Larry calls on Peter Prayne."

"The first move in the game! I see it!" exclaimed Donald. "Let me be there to corner the villain!"

"Not for a thousand!" protested Dick.

"Don't you see that the play against Rosa and the one on the merchant run together?"

"The same men are doing it," replied Donald. "I want to find the girl."

"Very well. Confront Larry Lang now and accuse him, and Rosa will not be restored. Jack o' Diamonds is one of the coolest and most desperate men in New York. He comes often to the nest under the docks, and some of his games originate there. I haven't frequented the wharves all my life for nothing. Rosa is safer, wherever she is, with Larry Lang at the big hotel than she would be with him under arrest and Jack o' Diamonds on the path of vengeance."

There was logic in the wharf shadow's remarks, and Donald was not slow to see it.

"Go ahead, Dick," he said, looking the young detective in the face. "The drifting boat is still a mystery to me, but time will clear it up."

"It is clear to me now. The occupants of the boat got into another craft, and it was turned adrift to deceive the water cops. To-morrow Peter Prayne will receive another visitor besides Larry."

"I trust it will be a visitor with his eyes open," smiled Donald, who saw through the young spy's words.

"It will be no other kind!" was the assurance. "When I was on the wharf to-day I saw the sneaking figure of Red Reynard, Jack o' Diamonds's partner. The fellow was trying to make up for his failure to keep up with us when we were taking Goldenrod to identify the ring. He watched me like a hawk, and once more I gave him the slip, in broad daylight, too. These fellows are sharp, but sometimes they lose a point when they expect to make one."

And the Dodger laughed over his adventure with the crook.

Donald was anxious to know at what hotel Larry Lang was airing himself in style, but he did not like to question the Wharf Spy Detective, for he knew that the boy would curb his curiosity by a flat refusal to impart the information.

After awhile the pair parted, and Donald went back to his desk in the newspaper office.

Dick Sly, who now wore a suit of clothes in which Mother Sturgeon would not have recognized him, boarded a car and was soon whirling up-town.

A short time later he appeared in front of a hotel noted for its massiveness and style.

The electric lights that blazed in front of the structure illuminated a great deal of space, and the Dodger found himself in a crowd of people who were airing themselves in the pleasant night air.

The boy strolled past the open doors and into the brilliant reception room.

His sparkling eyes were on the lookout. "I'm off o' my old beat, sure enough!" he mentally exclaimed. "This is paradise compared with the gloomy docks, where I've slept on bales and shadowed night prowlers for the clumsy cops. It must cost a power of money to live here, but if Donald told me fair, Larry must have feathered his nest from Solomon Strauss's till!"

At this juncture a stylishly-dressed young man of twenty-four came down from the dining-room, and lighted a cigar at the cigar-stall.

Dick "spotted" him in an instant.

"That is my friend Larry!" he decided, watching the young fellow closely from an excellent point of observation. "He has enjoyed a boss supper, and tops off on a better cigar than he ever puffed about Solomon Strauss's establishment. Ah! if Solomon could see him here, what a picnic there'd be!"

Having enjoyed his cigar for a few moments in the lobby, Larry Lang strolled to the pavement.

Dick Sly noticed that the fellow's eyes were on the alert.

Was he suspicious? Had Jack o' Diamonds put him on guard?

Several times he glanced covertly at his watch, and all at once he started off at a brisk gait.

The wharf spy followed him at a respectful distance, and saw him approach one of the numerous cabs that lined the curb waiting for customers.

Larry said a few words to the cabman, the door opened, and he got in.

"Going to take an extended airing, eh?" exclaimed Dick, as the driver mounted to the box. "Well, Larry, you sha'n't go alone."

The vehicle wheeled into the street, and as it started off on a straight line, the dock spy bound

ed after it, and dexterously caught a snug position between the hind wheels.

Dick could imagine Larry leaning back in the cab enjoying his cigar and revolving some cherished plans in his mind. The ferret of the dock was in clover.

The cab kept on over the stones, down one street and up another, but all the while the horses were taking it toward East River.

"You're carryin' double thar! Unload yer extra trunk! Whip behind!"

These sentences were yelled at the driver as the cab scattered a lot of gamins in crossing a square.

The man in the box, a surly, ill-looking fellow, clutched his whip and leaned back. The street Arabs saw the action and redoubled their shouts.

"A hanger-on, have I?" growled the driver. "By Jehu! I like to cut the cab leeches loose!" And the next moment the cutting lash came down over the top of the vehicle and hit the boy square in the face!

The blow stung like a scorpion, and made Dick shut his teeth hard. Still, he held on.

A moment later a perfect storm of blows were rained upon face and hands. The Jehu of the whip seemed a demon.

At last it became more than heroic Dick could stand, and he relinquished his hold and dropped.

The next minute the cab was gone.

The wharf spotter had lost his prey!

CHAPTER VIII.

WHERE LARRY WENT.

WHARF SPY DICK was in no good humor when he picked himself up amid the jeers of the gamins who had witnessed the driver's triumph.

Because Dick's clothes were respectable in appearance, the sympathy of the little ragamuffins was not with him. If they had known that the boy was a dock gamin they might have spared him, but this was information which nobody had imparted.

At first thought, and while the jeers of the rag-tag crowd rung in his ears, Dick felt like jumping into the pack and waging battle.

His blood was hot.

As if they did not want to tempt the wharf boy too far, the street Arabs gradually ceased their yells, though an occasional taunt sounded in Dick's ears as he moved away.

He noted the direction in which the cab had disappeared before he started off.

It was toward the river, then not very far away.

He knew it would be useless to follow Larry Lang afoot, so he retraced his steps discomfited, but by no means disheartened.

"To-morrow I'll begin to get even with you, Larry," muttered Dick. "To-morrow, at ten, you will call on Peter Prayne in furtherance of the brilliant scheme which Jack o' Diamonds has thought out."

In a little while Dick was far from the scene of his failure, and his face was turned toward his old kingdom on the docks.

We will go back and follow the cab.

"I cut that young cab leech loose!" exclaimed the Jehu, shouting to the passenger inside.

"Was there really a boy on behind?" asked Larry, showing a good deal of interest in the subject.

"There was nothing else, sir."

"Won't he try it again?"

"Not that gutter-snipe from the way the lash cut him! Oh, it takes Billy Bangs to cut 'em off!"

And the driver straightened on his seat and went back to business.

Meanwhile, Larry had finished his cigar, but the fragrant perfumes of it still remained in the cab.

"Aha! to-morrow I enact a new *role!*" burst suddenly from his throat, and he rubbed his kidded hands as if in glee. "I guess I'm up in the piece to play it to a T. One good turn deserves another, and I've no objection to helpin' Jack, seeing that I'm to profit by the success of the play. There's to be no more Baxter street counter life for Larry Lang. I followed it as long as the goose yielded her golden egg, and when something better crossed my path I left Solomon. Where are we now?" And Larry looked out and noted the buildings which seemed to tell him that he was near his journey's end, for a satisfied expression overspread his countenance. "Another square and I'll get out. I think the driver discovered that boy just in time. By Jove! it may have been Dick Sly, who is giving Jack so much trouble just now."

The cab kept on for some distance, when it drew up to the curb and the horses came to a stand still.

The driver sprung down and opened the door.

As Larry made his appearance he handed the man three silver dollars.

The cabman looked surprised.

"Two of them are for whipping the street vermin loose," said Larry, with a smile, and the man bowed and dropped the money into his pocket.

"Do you want to go back?" he asked.

"Not to-night," replied Larry, and the cab was turning in the street while he waited at a certain door for a response to his ring.

The door was opened by a rather good-looking woman of forty, who smiled as she greeted the young man.

"Is he in yet?" asked Larry.

"He is up-stairs now," was the reply.

The following moment the ex-clerk hastened up a flight of steps and walked into a room at a table of which sat a man with his back to the door. He was an odd-looking personage, stooped and homely; with a scattering gray beard on his face, and a pair of keen eyes behind old-fashioned spectacles.

"So you have come—at last?" he exclaimed in a rasping voice as he turned the battery of his eyes upon Larry, whom he scrutinized from head to foot.

"Well, I'm here, which is a pretty good sign that I've come," was the reply.

"Don't you know that my time is precious?" continued the spectacled man.

"That's why I came early," smiled the young fellow.

As he concluded he drew a chair up to the table and seated himself before the man.

"I've got the documents with me," Larry went on, and he threw a packet upon the table. "There! untie them, Mr. Fleece, an' see what you can make out."

Fergus Fleece was not exactly a lawyer, though he dealt sometimes in law.

He had a dingy little office not far from the house in which he had met Larry, and from it he sent some queer advertisements to the papers. He pretended to be an expert in finding old titles to property, in hunting lost heirs, and in recovering hidden fortunes.

Buried in the depths of New York and seldom seen out of his office, Fergus Fleece had a strange existence.

He was naturally shrewd, knew the property laws of all countries, and had settled some strange cases.

People who went to him, and they were many, soon found out that his keen eyes were not for nothing; he seemed to have the faculty of getting at the gist of an old document at a glance. He was the butt of many a joke cracked in elegant offices, but the jokers had to admit his shrewdness.

Larry took several turns about the room while Fergus Fleece looked at the parchment-like papers he had thrown on the table.

Every now and then he would cast a furtive glance at the old man as if to read his thoughts through his countenance.

All at once the old man uttered a singular cry.

"Where did you get these papers, anyhow?" he exclaimed, looking up at Larry who had stopped in his rounds and was staring at him.

"Why, are they worth something, Mr. Fleece?" and the young man came forward and rested his hands on the table.

"They might be," remarked Fleece cautiously. "But you haven't told me how you came by them."

"Won't you excuse me if I do not?"

"Oh, yes," and there was a faint smile at the corners of the old man's mouth where a smile was seldom seen. "I will say that these papers may become valuable some day."

"What do you know about the property they speak of? I told you some time ago to hunt the matter up."

"I have looked into the matter a little."

"Well?"

"I find that the only living heir, if indeed he or she be living, is the child of Morgan Blair's granddaughter."

"Just so."

"There is this difficulty, Mr. Lang. There are millions of people in this world."

"I haven't the exact number, but it is millions, Mr. Fleece," smiled Larry, with a half-mock bow.

"Yes, and we look for a needle in a haystack when we look for this child, who may be dead."

A frown came over Larry's face, but a smile sudden and bright chased it away,

"I want to know if the child can inherit if found," he ejaculated. "We'll discuss the unimportant questions after awhile."

"Certainly," exclaimed Fleece, without hesitation. "All the law in Christendom couldn't cheat the heir."

"A thousand thanks," and Larry's hand reached forward for the documents. "That is all for the present, Mr. Fleece."

"All?" echoed the old heir-finder, leaning back in his chair and giving Larry a sharp look through his glasses. "You could have transacted this business at my office. Have you dragged me to this place to get an opinion which could have been given anywhere?"

"I have a method of my own," spoke the young man rather sharply, though the next moment his voice melted into a softer tone. "I preferred privacy away from a business office, Mr. Fleece," he went on.

"Don't you want my services?" asked the title-hunter.

"I may need you."

"Which opens the door for you to employ some one else!" snapped Fergus Fleece. "Very well! You are at liberty to employ whom you please. There are better offices than mine uptown. My furniture wouldn't bring twenty-five dollars, but Fergus Fleece wouldn't swap places with the richest title lawyer in New York."

The old fellow had left his chair and stood midway between table and door with an antiquated hat in his hand.

His eyes sparkled like the little orbs of a teased serpent.

"As I am dismissed I will say that my bill is twenty-five dollars!" he exclaimed.

"Do you want to break a man up?" cried Larry.

"Twenty-five dollars; consultation and examination," was the cold reply.

It was more money than Larry had on his person at that moment.

"I'd better pay the old leech," muttered the young man. "He has given me more than twenty-five dollars' worth of counsel. I can now afford to put the matter into other hands."

"Wait a moment," he said, to Fergus Fleece, and then disappeared from the room.

In a little while he came back with some bills in his hands.

The title-hunter stood where he had left him, and it took but a moment to pay him his demand.

"If I want you again I will call," sneered Larry, as Fleece got to the door.

"I'm at everybody's service," was the reply.

"Good-night, Mr. Lang."

Fergus Fleece went down the stairs, and Larry heard the front door shut behind him.

"This is a pretty good night's work!" ejaculated the young man, as he began to gather up the papers which Fergus Fleece had gone over. "There may be the foundation of a colossal fortune in this little by-play of mine. I—What has become of the last paper Fergus Fleece examined?—the important one?"

Larry seemed to hold his breath as he ran over the papers with care.

He looked at them one after another and laid them on a pile.

"It is gone!" he cried. "The old shark has robbed me. He knew just what to take, too. The remaining papers are worth nothing without the one he carried off. I was a fool to leave him alone a second. I must beat him. I can't have him arrested. No! I dare not do that!"

CHAPTER IX.

A SLEEK RASCAL.

THE next morning before Peter Prayne the merchant went down town to his place of business, he was visited by a boy whom he had never seen before.

The girl who opened the door to the youth's ring was about to dismiss him when he said in a raised voice that he desired to see Mr. Prayne on very important business.

The merchant himself heard the words and the caller was admitted.

"I am Dick Sly," was the self-introduction, as the boy, well-built and good-looking, confronted him in the library.

"Well, Richard, what can I do for you?" was the response.

"I came to say that you are going to have an important visitor to-day."

"At the store?" asked the merchant, seemingly interested at once.

"At the store if he cannot find you at home, where I think he prefers to see you."

"He has a preference then?" smiled the merchant.

Dick nodded.

"The visitor, who is a good-looking, stylish young man, is coming to see you about your child."

The merchant started, and a cloud of sadness instantly enveloped his face.

"Am I to be bled again?" he exclaimed. "What does this fellow know, my boy?"

"That is just what I want to find out!" declared Dick, as his eyes got a bright gleam.

Peter Prayne looked puzzled.

"The man to come is named Larry Lang," the boy went on. "He is to call here at ten o'clock. Can't you manage to let me hear what he has to say?"

"This is becoming a mystery," remarked the merchant. "I am to have a visitor, a perfect stranger, and you, a boy whom I never saw before, want to overhear the interview. Who are you, and what brings you here on this singular errand?"

The dock detective took a step toward Peter Prayne.

"As I have told you, I am Dick Sly," he replied. "I spend most of my time on the river front spotting the river rogues."

"Maybe you're the boy who furnished the police with a clew to the wharf rats who tampered with some of our goods a year ago. Are you that boy?"

"Maybe I am," answered Dick with a flush.

"Then I am almost ready to grant any request you want to make. What is it, sir? You want to hear the interview between Mr. Lang and myself, I believe?"

"That is it."

"Then you shall, every word of it!"

A sparkle in Dick's eyes showed that he was delighted.

"I can conceal you behind yon curtain that conceals some books," continued Mr. Prayne. "Is this Mr. Lang honest in his business?"

"By no means. He is merely a go-between for others."

"Then I am to treat him accordingly?"

"By no means!" demurred the boy quickly. "I would like to have him go away with the impression that you believe him the pink of honesty."

"I will do it. It is almost ten o'clock now. I have been annoyed so much since I lost my poor boy that we seldom admit anybody. I will give orders to have Mr. Lang admitted when he comes."

As it was approaching the hour for Larry Lang's expected call, Dick Sly did not quit the house, but remained in the library.

At last the clear tones of the bell echoed through the mansion.

"Larry's on time!" ejaculated Dick.

"Fix yourself behind the curtain. I will answer the ring in person," and as the Wharf Spy Detective disappeared the merchant left the room.

He presently returned accompanied by a man whose voice the boy among the books instantly recognized.

"I am pleased to see you, Mr. Lang," said the merchant with well feigned politeness that sent a satisfied smile over Dick's face. "To what business am I indebted for this call?"

"I have called to talk about a matter which I know must be always near your heart," was the answer. "Some time ago you lost a son, a mere child, who disappeared mysteriously in the streets of New York."

"That is true, Mr. Lang. Years have passed since that terrible catastrophe, and the mystery remains unsolved, like the mystery that envelops the fate of Charley Ross."

"But you haven't given up hopes, Mr. Prayne?" asked Larry, who had taken an armchair near the merchant's private desk.

"While there is life, hope lasts," was the answer. "One would think that I had exhausted all the means of discovery."

"You have followed up many futile clews no doubt?"

"Scores of them! Some of the best detectives in New York tell me that the lost will never be found, but I have hopes that the unexpected will happen."

"That is why I am here," ejaculated Larry. "I believe the unexpected is about to happen."

"Concerning my son?"

"Yes. A certain person who does not want to appear in the transaction came to me recently and asked if the reward you offered for your son's return was still good."

"It is good as ever," was the response.

"Then I believe hope has found a tangible foundation. Now, all preliminary remarks aside, Mr. Prayne, I am here to say that your son can be placed in your arms for a certain sum."

Larry paused and looked at the merchant as if to note the effect of his announcement.

"I have been deceived so often that—"

"But this is no deception!" And Larry leaned forward and laid his hand on the merchant's knee. "I happen to know something about the man who came to me with the proposition. While there is a bar sinister against him—I am going to be fair with you, you see—he will keep every promise he makes. He has said to me under oath that for the sum of fifty thousand dollars your son will be restored."

"He was kidnapped then?" exclaimed Peter Prayne. "I am asked to condone a felony, am I?"

Larry drew back, and the boy behind the curtain bit his lips vexatiously.

"I am here to offer no opinion," replied Larry. "My sole desire in this matter is to see you happy, and your son and heir under your roof once more. The man who makes the proposition which involves the payment of fifty thousand dollars for the return of your son, I believe is in a position to keep his part of the programme to the letter."

A short silence followed Larry's little speech.

"When can the agreement, if made, be carried out, Mr. Lang?"

"Within forty-eight hours."

"Do you know where the boy is?"

"No, the secret is the property of the man who makes the proposition. I only agreed to bring it to you from a desire to see the lost restored."

How disinterested Larry was! How eager the young tapper of Solomon Strauss's till was to have justice done! The spectacle brought a smile of derision to Dick Sly's face, and he wanted to rush from his hiding-place and read a portion of Larry's past for Peter Prayne's benefit.

"You are to convey my reply to the man, are you?" suddenly asked the merchant.

"I promised to," was the response.

"He requests an answer in writing. You have but to say that you accept his proposition and sign your name to it. Do you think he asks too much?"

"No. I can easily see that he wants to protect himself. What if I should refuse, Mr. Lang?"

"I can imagine that the man would become incensed."

"And never make a similar proposition, eh?"

"Yes."

Peter Prayne turned to his desk and took up a pen.

"When and how is the money to be paid?" he asked, with a glance at Larry.

"That will be settled a little further on."

The next moment the merchant was writing slowly, and when he had finished he handed his work to the young scamp.

"That will do, I think," remarked Larry, glancing up from the writing which was an acceptance of the proposition lately made.

"That is further than I have ever gone before," added the merchant verbally to the note.

"I trust a great deal to your individual honesty in this affair, Mr. Lang."

"I think you can trust me," answered the ex-clerk. "If I become an humble instrument in the hands of justice I shall feel honored."

Meantime Larry had folded the note and placed it safely in his pocket.

A moment later he left his chair with an air which indicated that his business was concluded.

"When will I hear from the—the negotiator?" questioned Peter Prayne.

"Sometime between now and the time you return from your store. A sealed message will be delivered at your place of business."

"That will do."

When Larry turned his back on the room and walked out Dick the dock rat came from his hiding-place.

His eyes had a triumphant sparkle.

"The rascal knows how to play a game as coolly as his pal, Jack o' Diamonds!" he exclaimed. "I didn't think it was in Larry. Now, let me follow the trail I have struck. If I am not mistaken, it will lead to two important results."

At that moment the merchant came back to the library. He had just dismissed Larry at the front steps.

"Well, my boy—"

"Not now, Mr. Prayne," interrupted Dick, clutching the merchant's arm. "You played your part admirably. The fellow is no slouch as a go-between. Now let me see what is going to come of it. I want to get upon the street immediately, but not through your front door."

"Follow me, then," exclaimed the merchant, who seemed to appreciate the need of haste, and he led Dick to a wicket, through which he passed

to the street, without raising any suspicion that he had come from the Prayne mansion.

"Ah, the scamp is in sight," exclaimed the boy, as he caught sight of a figure with which he had already grown familiar. "Now, Larry, we will see what comes of this play. I am not to be whipped off a cab this time! Fifty thousand dollars, is it? Jack o' Diamonds is striking for big wages. Forge ahead, Larry; Dick, the dock rat, is at your heels."

And Larry obeyed the boy by pushing rapidly away, keenly watched the while.

CHAPTER X.

THE DECOY TO DOOM.

"WELL, how did you make out?"

"Fairly."

"He was willing to treat, eh?"

"Yes."

"Let me see the proofs."

The person of whom "the proofs" were demanded was Larry Lang, and he had just stepped into the presence of a rather fine-looking man in a small room down town.

Of course the strange individual was Jack o' Diamonds, the crook, and when Larry was asked for the proofs he drew forth a paper, which he passed to the mustached rascal.

"Hang me if you didn't fetch it in black and white!" cried Jack, glancing at the young man. "You're a trump from the heart o' the pack, Larry. Listen to what he has written," and the crook read briefly as follows:

"I hereby accept the proposition made by the bearer of this paper. Let there be no failure."

"PETER PRAYNE."

"That covers the ground, eh, Larry?" continued Jack. "Did he think the sum named a little high?"

"A little high," was the echo. "But he didn't haggle over it. I think another ten thousand could have been added to it."

"You do, hey? Well, maybe this is only a beginning. I presume you haven't seen anything of the young wharf shadow?"

"Nothing," answered Larry, not knowing, of course, that Dick Sly had tracked him from the merchant's house to the room he now occupied.

"As I told you at our last meeting, I'm going to catch the wharf rat to-day," laughed Jack, maliciously. "The trap I have set for him is excellently baited, and cannot fail."

"When do you spring it?"

"Between now and sundown."

"Does Red Reynard help?"

"No. He let the rat get away from him the other night like a toothless terrier, therefore, I prefer to play this game myself."

"Which is a good idea. When do you intend to advance upon the fifty thousand?"

"Very soon. You told him that a reply would be left at the store?"

"I did."

"I will carry out that part of the programme."

Larry gave Jack a very inquisitive look and leaned toward him with curiosity in his eyes.

"Say, Jack?"

"Well, what is it?"

"Have you really got the boy—the merchant's lost child?" asked Larry.

Jack o' Diamonds started, and then gave vent to a light laugh.

"Do you think I'd play a hand like this if I hadn't?" he ejaculated.

"Fifty thousand is a big pile," remarked Larry.

"It tops all your drawings from Solomon Strauss's till, eh?"

Larry colored and tried to laugh, but the attempt was not successful.

"Let time tell whether I have the lost boy or not," continued Jack, growing serious. "I haven't revolved this brilliant scheme in my head for nothing. But how is the future Mrs. Lang, my boy?"

"Oh, she is getting along splendidly," was the reply.

"That was a pretty trick, too. The losing of the ring was the unexpected; however, nobody is going to profit by it in the long run. If the water cops had found it, it would have created a sensation, and some shrewd spotter would have discovered ere this that it late'y graced the finger of Larry Lang. But a boy found it, a boy who thought he saw a chance to work up a case on his own hook. I call that fortunate, Larry. We can outwit the boy, but the police would have given us trouble."

Larry heard Jack through with a show of impatience.

"I am glad you are going to trap the young

rat, anyhow," he answered. "I wish you could also recover the ring itself."

"Leave that to me."

"Which means that you will recover it?"

"I have found the rat's nest, and I think I will find something there when I search it."

"Do it, Jack!" cried Larry. "Recover the ring, and take the profound and eternal gratitude of Larry Lang."

Without replying to this outburst, Jack o' Diamonds wheeled his chair to the table at his elbow and took up a sheet of paper as if he had dismissed the young man whom he was making his tool.

"What a man he is!" mentally ejaculated Larry as he watched the crook. "Twice in Sing Sing and goodness knows how often in other prisons. What a fellow he'd be to force my stolen paper from Fergus Fleece; but I dare not mention the matter to him. I was a fool last night when I left the old shark alone with the papers. I see it all now, and I'm afraid my pet by-play will yield me nothing."

For some minutes Jack o' Diamonds wrote slowly on the sheet of paper he had spread before him.

He seemed to have forgotten that the room had two tenants. When he stopped he looked up and appeared surprised by Larry's proximity.

"Come here between nine and ten to-night," he spoke. "I think I will delight you with a report and a find."

"I'll be on hand," replied the young man, as he left the chair.

"You'd better go back to the hotel. Solomon Strauss will never look for you there."

"Larry could not suppress a start."

"Does Solomon—"

He stopped like a man who catches himself, and flushed.

"There's no telling what that Jew will do," smiled Jack. "You see he may have discovered that a man can't patronize Hawk's Hollow and wear diamond rings on twenty dollars a month. Some of these hawks o' Jewry are vindictive when they get in the proper humor. Yes, I think up-town life is good for you during the daytime."

Then Jack o' Diamonds went back to his writing, and Larry, with a faint "good-day," stole from the little room.

A new thought took sudden possession of him as he went down the steps that led to the sidewalk.

He was in the power of one of the most desperate of criminals. Not only this, but he was assisting him to play a game which, if discovered, might throw them both into the iron clutches of the law.

"I'll not have anything to do with him after I recover the ring," muttered Larry. "Let me get my hands on that, and I'll paddle my own canoe thereafter."

He pushed rapidly up-town, as if anxious to get away from Jack o' Diamonds, and in a little while was back at the hotel.

Meantime, Jack finished his writing, which he placed in an envelope, sealed it and hid it under his coat.

"The young fellow carried out his part o' the programme pretty well," he exclaimed to himself. "Of course it wouldn't have done for me to invade Peter Prayne's mansion. I'm too old a bird for that. With the eyes of the cops open for the tricks o' Jack o' Diamonds, I'm not going to put my fingers into the fire. If Larry told the merchant all I wanted told, the man won't have any spies at the store waiting for the next move. However, I'll get a boy to deliver the letter, and the papers to-morrow will be my reply."

When Jack o' Diamonds left the house, he was seen by a keen-eyed boy who had let Larry pass up-town without molestation.

Dick Sly knew that Larry had entered the building for the purpose of meeting somebody, and he was anxious to catch a glimpse of that person.

When Jack struck the sidewalk, wearing the same whiskers in which he had once appeared to Dick as Silas Seldon, Jr., the dock-rat detective immediately caught sight of him.

"What's to be the next move now, Jack?" exclaimed Dick, starting off after the crook. "I recollect that Peter Prayne is to receive a communication at his store between now and four o'clock. Are you to deliver it in person, Jack o' Diamonds? I hardly think you will appear on the surface just yet."

While the crook threw a dozen sly glances about, he did not see the boy, who adroitly hid himself among pedestrians, but who saw him all the same.

Jack suddenly turned into a more crowded street, and led Dick a chase toward the East River docks, the boy's well-known domain.

"Hello! where've you been keepin' yerself so long?" hailed a voice, and the next moment the ideal wharf rat sprung upon Dick from the top of a lot of goods that were piled on the dock. "You've got kinder stuck up o' late, ain't you, Dick? Or, mebbe, Mother Sturgeon has sent you ter college ter make a halderman out o' ye? You used ter come ter 'the chapel,' but o' late you've given all o' us the go-by. An' good clothes, too! Why, bless me, if you don't look like a shinin' hexample o' reclamation!"

Dick knew the boy for Tony Whack, one of the shrewdest and most conscienceless of the wharf rat family.

More than once Tony had served him when he was serving the police, and the two had come often together.

Dick looked about for Jack o' Diamonds, but the crook had passed out of sight.

"I say, Dick, what'll you give for a genuine 'find?'" continued Tony Whack.

"I don't want anything of the kind."

Tony drew back with a well-feigned expression of contempt on his hardened countenance.

"Another proof that Mother Sturgeon has turned saint!" he sneered. "Very well; I guess I kin keep what I know. Mebbe Tony Whack kin work out the hull o' the scheme he has got onto. If he does, there'll be nobody to share with. I'll see whether the old merchant's reward o' ten thousand is still standin'."

A thrill shot through the young detective's mind.

Was Tony really talking about Peter Prayne's lost boy?

"What is it, Tony?" he asked.

"Never mind, Dick. Go back to Mother Sturgeon, an' be a good halderman some day. They'll be nobody to divide with if Tony Whack gets it all by his own efforts."

"Why, I'm not booked for college, Tony!" exclaimed Dick. "I'm the same person I've always been, only I'm just tryin' the sensations of good clothes as a diversion."

Tony drew back and looked at the wharf-rat spy.

"Honest?" he exclaimed.

"Honest!" echoed Dick.

"By glory! I'm goin' to b'lieve you!" was the answer; and Tony, with a sly look about him, came forward again. "I guess the reward is big enough for two, Dick. Come to 'the chapel' at three o'clock to-day."

"I'll be there," was the response, and Tony Whack's eyes got a glitter of victory.

CHAPTER XI.

THE TRAP SPRUNG.

"THE CHAPEL" was not much of a place.

It was merely a hollow under the docks where the wharf rats met at times to make merry in their peculiar way.

A few broken store-boxes and crates served for benches, and when a score or more of the wharf scavengers of New York were gathered there, some wild and strange orgies were enacted.

Of late, however, 'the chapel' had not been much frequented for the purposes just mentioned, and knowing this, Tony Whack, Jack o' Diamonds's decoy, knew that Dick Sly would consider it an excellent place for the imparting of a secret.

When Tony went back to the gloomy underworld of the docks, he met his friend Bender, to whom he imparted the information that the dock detective would be at "the chapel" at three o'clock that afternoon.

Bender was delighted, and Tony was congratulated on his success.

"Of course we want to keep all this from Prince Peter," remarked Bender, referring to the crippled boy who was their companion in the dock nest.

"He'll never find it out if he wants for me to tell him," snapped Tony. "What has he been doing since I've been gone?"

"Stringing buttons an' dozin' in the nest," answered Bender. "O' late, some-how-or-other, that boy has changed in countenance, Tony."

"Think so, Bender?"

"I know it."

"Mebbe he thinks—"

"Thar's no tellin' what he thinks," was the interruption.

"What have you noticed?"

"The other day I saw him lookin' intently at one o' the buttons. He would hold it up in the light as if it was a ten-dollar gold-piece. I caught him at it several times. It was a peculiar button made for a boy's frock. I never saw

any like it before, but it seemed to attract Prince Peter."

"Did you cabbage the button?"

"I cut it off the string when he was asleep."

"Well?"

"I showed it to Jack an' he said 'Great heavens! whar did ye get that?' I told him off o' Peter's string, an' he made me look if thar was any more like it than."

"And you did not find another like it?"

"It was the only one."

Tony was silent for a moment.

"Bender, that button took Prince Peter back to his childhood, when he did not live under the docks," continued Tony.

"I know it."

"No wonder Jack wants all them buttons," and Tony smiled. "We could sell 'em for ten dollars apiece if we had a few."

Bender's eyes seemed to glisten avariciously, but he made no reply.

"There will be no strangers at 'the chapel' to-day, Bender?" asked Tony.

"Of course not."

"Jack won't come any more until after we have fixed the dock spy. There must be no failure, Bender, for, if the half of what Jack said is true, we can't afford to have Dick Sly on the docks."

"That is correct, Tony; Jack isn't springing his trap a bit too soon!"

The two youths went to their old quarters where they found Prince Peter the cripple at his old occupation of stringing buttons of various kinds.

The boy looked haggard and pale in the sickly light of the lantern that hung overhead, and when he saw his companions a faint smile appeared at his lips.

"At the same old business, Peter?" exclaimed Tony, throwing himself on the ground and looking up into the boy's face. "Don't you wish you had all the buttons in New York to string?"

"That would take a lifetime, Tony, and I don't want to end my days at this work," was the answer.

"Then you want to leave us, eh, Peter?"

The little cripple threw a look about him.

"I don't want to die here," he smiled, "but I guess there's no other place for me."

"It's good enough to die in, eh, Bender?" laughed Tony, and Bender nodded and echoed his companion's merriment; then he leaned toward the cripple and continued: "Mebbe, Peter, we'll all get to show off in a mansion one o' these days, an' then no one will think o' dyin' in a place like this."

The cripple did not reply, but went on with his daily amusement, taking the buttons from a box on the ground, and putting them one after another on the string.

Tony and Bender watched him in silence.

Every now and then they would see the sad countenance light up as if with hope, and for a moment the deep blue eyes would beam with a light out of place under the docks.

After the passage of a significant look between them, the two boys crept away and left the little button-stringer alone.

They made their way to "the chapel," which was quite deserted and lonely.

"It is all ready," exclaimed Bender. "Nothing is lackin' in the arrangements, and Jack can't but be satisfied."

"I'm glad it's all right, boys."

The two wharf rats turned at the sound of the voice, and beheld the figure of Jack o' Diamonds before them. The noted crook seemed to have risen from the ground, and for a moment the boys were puzzled to account for his presence there.

"I let my curiosity get the better o' me," continued Jack. "The old trap hasn't been worked for so long that I thought I'd take a look at it."

"You found the trigger, then?" asked Bender.

"Oh, yes."

"And worked it?"

"I tried it once; that was enough," was the reply. "I put a stone on the door, an' saw that everything is in apple-pie order. I guess you boys know how to catch a weasel even when he is awake."

"If we don't, we know nothing!" smiled Tony Whack.

Once more "the chapel" was left alone and deserted, and the conspirators against Dick Sly went back toward the nest.

Jack o' Diamonds did not want to disturb Prince Peter over his buttons, but after looking at him a few moments he withdrew after giving a few instructions to the boys.

Bender with a strange look watched him out of sight and when the figure of the crook had disappeared he turned to Tony with a faint smile.

"That man is engaged in the biggest game o' his life," he exclaimed. "He actually got pale when I showed him the button which seemed to give Prince Peter a glimpse of the past. When you an' I get a little older, Tony, we'll play games for ourselves; we'll be no man's tool then."

"An' mebbe we'll graduate, like Jack, in Sing Sing."

"Oh, that's to be expected. All great men graduate thar!" grinned Bender, who looked forward to a life of crime which had to be the natural outcome of the life he was living. "Mebbe we won't have a Prince Peter to play for a big card like Jack has."

"An' no Dick to shadow us either!" was the response.

While the day full of sunshine was passing over busy New York, the hours were wearing slowly away amid the gloom of the low-ceiled places under the docks.

The sun reached the meridian and began its journey down the west.

The hour of three approached, and the rats that scampered hither and thither under the wharf drew back from two figures lying at the rim of the hollow known as "the chapel."

Tony Whack and Bender were waiting for Dick Sly.

"He won't come," whispered Bender, whose patience was leaving him. "He has winded the scheme, and isn't going to give us a chance to spring the trap."

"Give him a little latitude," answered Tony.

"Ah! some one is coming now!"

At that moment the flight of a score of rats announced the approach of some one, and in a little while Tony left his companion and crept toward the basin.

"Is it you, Dick?" he asked in cautious tones.

"I'm on hand, Tony."

As these words were spoken Bender's hand moved forward and clutched a stout string.

"I'm a little behind, ain't I, Tony?" inquired the same voice which was that of the young spotter of the docks.

"A minute, mebbe, but that's nothin'."

The two boys met near the middle of the basin.

The darkness about them was almost palpable. Far away glimmered a light, but its rays did not reach them.

"I'm ready to hear from you, Tony," suddenly resumed Dick. "You know you wanted me to come to 'the chapel' to hear about the pointer you have picked up."

"I recollect," replied Tony. "I want to make sure that we're alone here. Wait for me here till I make a circle. I won't be gone long."

"Hurry up," said Dick, and Tony crept away.

"It is the easiest thing in the world," he murmured as he glided back to the spot where he had left Bender with the cord in his hand.

"Dick Sly isn't half as sly as his name suggests. Jack thought we'd have some trouble with him, but it is no trouble at all. I must be near Bender. Ah! here we are!"

The two youths met in the darkness and Tony Whack clutched Bender's wrist as he placed his lips at his ear.

"The fly is in the middle o' the web, Bender. I've just left him there awaiting his doom. Jerk the cord—quick!—Ah! that catches the bird!"

At that very moment Bender pulled with all his might, and a strange sound was the result.

"Now, back! Let me help you," ejaculated Tony, catching the cord with both hands, and the two boys pulled hard for a moment.

"There! that completes an' covers the work!" cried Bender, throwing the cord down. "The floor of 'the chapel' is solid again and ready for the next victim. Shall we go down, Tony?"

The two boys descended into the basin, and searched it in the gloom. The floor was as solid as if a circular trap had not opened in the center, and Tony kicked some dirt and dust over the spot.

Dick Sly was gone!

He had been decoyed to 'the chapel,' and the trap there, known to but few of the rats of the dock, had brushed him from Jack o' Diamonds's path!

Tony and Bender went back to the nest where Prince Peter was still busy with his buttons. But they did not see the sparkle of the cripple's eyes.

CHAPTER XII.

WORKING THE BIG SCHEME.

PETER PRAYNE, the merchant, was about to quit his store for the day when a boy deposited

a sealed letter on his desk, and escaped before the astonished man could have him detained.

The letter, when opened, was found to be from a person who knew all about Larry's visit to the merchant's house. Indeed, the writer said that he was the person who was to restore the long missing boy, and announced that Larry had acted under instructions from him.

Mr. Prayne was asked to meet the writer at a certain office on Beekman street that night. He was told to come alone.

"If you are accompanied or watched by detectives you will find the office closed, and your son will never be restored," was the concluding sentence of the letter.

"I wonder if Dodger Dick, the young dock detective knows about the delivery of this letter?" the merchant asked himself, and as he folded it and placed it in an inner pocket he resolved to meet the writer at the hour and place mentioned.

This took place some time after the springing of the trap in "the chapel," and, if Peter Prayne had known that Dick Sly had been lured to the fatal place by the crook's tools, he would not have been so willing to meeting the writer.

When night had once more thrown her pall over the island mart, the merchant repaired to Beekman street.

He did not know that his store had been watched by a pair of keen eyes since his reception of the letter, but that did not matter.

He went to the rendezvous alone.

The room or "office" was on the second floor, a rather cosey and neatly-furnished place, and its sole occupant, when the merchant entered, was a black-bearded man, who appeared to be waiting for some one.

"You are punctual, I see," smiled this man as the merchant announced himself. "I am quite alone, as you perceive, and have been waiting for you."

Peter Prayne had taken a chair and was making a mental study of the speaker.

He had never met him before, and though he was well dressed and affected the manners of the gentleman, the man of business could see that he was in disguise.

"This is the man with whom I am to negotiate for my boy's restoration. He is a cool, calculating rascal. I can see this much without great scrutiny. Since my loss I have been thrown into contact with a score of his class."

The stranger, who called himself Silas Seldon, Jr.—a name already familiar to the reader—began the interview by saying that he was the person who had employed Larry to open negotiations with the merchant.

They had now come to the gist of the matter.

Mr. Prayne was reminded that he had lost a child, that the disappearance had baffled the best detectives of Gotham, and that, to the world at large, the boy was as much lost as ever.

"Now, Mr. Prayne, it is in my power to clear up the mystery," concluded the man, who was our old acquaintance, Jack o' Diamonds. "I have had to sacrifice a great deal to reach the victory I have lately gained. Your boy's whereabouts are known to me, and to me alone. Your signed agreement to pay me fifty thousand dollars for your child is still in my possession. You are still willing to carry it out?"

The merchant said "yes," and the crook proceeded.

"Circumstances oblige me to require one-half of the amount in advance. I shall ask for twenty-five thousand now, to be delivered to-night."

The merchant started.

"I never carry large amounts of money with me," he ejaculated.

"That is not at all strange," was the reply.

"You have it at the store."

"Which is closed now."

"But the safe?"

"It has a time-lock which cannot be opened till a certain time to-morrow."

Jack o' Diamonds was not abashed.

"You have friends at your house. I have a friend who will act as my agent. Mr. Prayne, I must have this deposit as a guarantee of good faith on your part."

"But my boy!" cried the merchant.

"He is ready to spring into your arms."

"Does he know?"

"That I am negotiating with you for his return? He is not entirely in the dark, and I can say that he approves of it all he knows. You will pay the guarantee money? I will call in my friend, whose office I am occupying for this interview."

Before Peter Prayne could reply, Jack o' Diamonds went to the door, and called a name in tones that reached the merchant's ears.

In response to the call, footsteps were heard, and a rather handsome man entered the room.

The new-comer was introduced to Mr. Prayne as Theodore Chaffinch, a lawyer who occupied the office.

In truth, the man was Red Reynard, Jack's confederate who was ready to play any hand that would advance the crook's big scheme.

Mr. Chaffinch volunteered to accompany the merchant to his house and receive a package at his hands, and having expressed this willingness, retired leaving Jack and Peter Prayne alone.

Again Peter Prayne wondered what had become of the boy, Dodger Dick. Were his keen eyes on the alert, and did he know anything about the present interview?

But for the Dodger he would never have received Lang in his library, and the scheme to rob him of fifty thousand dollars—he could look at it in no other light—would never have been encouraged.

Now he was in the clutches of two consummate rascals, one of whom was to accompany him home and bleed him for both to the tune of twenty-five thousand dollars.

What the next step would be no one knew.

"Within twenty-four hours after Mr. Chaffinch returns with the guarantee money, your lost son will be in your arms," resumed Jack o' Diamonds when his confederate had retired to be called for when wanted. "The boy is not in very good health, but your physician can make him himself again. Now, Mr. Prayne, if you are ready to show Mr. Chaffinch to your house, we will conclude this interview."

The merchant did not leave his chair.

"I cannot say that I like to surrender that amount of money to a stranger," he remarked.

Jack showed a frown.

"I see your affection cools as the years go by," he said with cruel sarcasm.

"No! My love for my boy is as strong to-day as it ever was," was the quick retort. "You say that you can produce him. What proof have you got of this?"

Jack o' Diamonds thrust one of his hands into a vest pocket and produced a bright-colored button, at sight of which the merchant started visibly.

"Isn't this proof enough?" he went on displaying the button and finally laying it on the table. "You have a right to expect proof, Peter Prayne, and I am glad to be able to accommodate you. Ah! I see you recollect the button!"

It was evident that the New York merchant had seen that identical button or one like it previous to the interview.

He took it up and looked at it a long time.

"I do know it," he suddenly exclaimed. "It was one of a number that graced my boy's jacket the day he disappeared. I never saw any like them on any other child."

"No other child ever wore them," answered the crook. "That button, Mr. Prayne, came from your boy's clothes."

After awhile the merchant handed back the gilt button, and looked at the face which was full of triumph in its expression.

"What if I cannot pay the guarantee to-night?" he asked.

"Then I cannot continue these negotiations," was the reply, and Jack o' Diamonds leaned across the little table at his elbow as the last words left his lips.

"The restoration of your child depends on your action to-night. Remember this, Peter Prayne.

And his lips closed like the lips of a king who has spoken an ultimatum.

"That is a threat," passed through the merchant's mind. "This man knows something about my boy else he could not have produced the button."

Then he said aloud.

"Where is Mr. Chaffinch?"

Jack o' Diamonds went to the door for the second time and called his pal.

In an instant Red Reynard was on hand ready for the twenty-five thousand-dollar swoop.

"This gentleman is ready to go," Jack said, throwing a glance toward the merchant.

"You will remain with him till he gives you a packet for me. He understands that the second half of an agreed sum is to be paid on the delivery of a certain specified object."

Peter Prayne slightly inclined his head, but made no audible reply.

The next moment he walked toward the door accompanied by the disguised villain who was to be his guard to his private rooms.

"Red will not come off without the notes!"

ejaculated Jack, rubbing his hands with delight.

"This is only the first draw though it is a good one. My experience with these money nabobs is that when the ice has been broken, the continuance of the game is easy. Why, this button is worth a fortune to me, and the boy under the dock is the key that unlocks the gold-mine. I will run up and see Larry before Red gets back. I want to tell him that the trap was successfully sprung this afternoon, and that the ring he lost needn't bother him any more.

Jack o' Diamonds locked the room behind him and went away.

He was not far behind the merchant and Red Reynard, and while he went up-town, he did not take the same route taken by them.

In due time Jack o' Diamonds reached the hotel where Larry boarded, and as he alighted from the car he noticed a surging crowd in the lobby.

"What is the matter?" he asked, as he touched the sidewalk.

"Didn't you see it? No? Well, a young reporter named Donald Dustin has just whipped a guest in there. It was a complete and neat thing, too. I saw it all. Something about a woman. The fellow's name is Larry something."

Jack waited to hear no more, but turned and walked away.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FIGHT AT THE HOTEL.

It was true that Donald, the young reporter, had found Larry the person supposed to be responsible for Rosa's disappearance.

Ever since his discovery that the girl was missing, he had been on the lookout for the young ex-clerk, and though he had promised Dick that he would not raise any disturbance if he found Larry, the temptation proved too great.

A short time before Jack o' Diamonds reached the hotel, Donald strolled into the lobby with no expectation of finding Larry there.

He had heard Dodger Dick's account of his attempt to follow the young fellow in the cab, but the boy had been careful not to name the hotel which enjoyed Larry's patronage.

When Donald saw the Jew's clerk complacently smoking a cigar in the lobby, he could hardly believe his eyes.

Larry did not see him, and the reporter studied him for some time, as he waited for him to quit the hotel and make a trail which should lead to Rosa.

There was no longer any doubt of Larry's connection with the abduction.

The ring found by Dick Sly in the picked-up boat had proved to be his, and Larry's association with Jack o' Diamonds had been established beyond all doubt.

Rosa was hidden somewhere, and the well-dressed, brazen-faced young man, who coolly enjoyed his cigar, held the key to the secret!

Donald thought of all these things while he watched Larry.

The ex-clerk did not seem eager to show him the trail, and the longer Donald watched him the stronger grew his rage.

"I'm going to force the young rascal to know me!" he suddenly ejaculated. "I can't keep my pledge to Dick any longer. It is time for me to make a pass of some kind. Here goes!"

The next moment he walked toward Larry, and the first intimation the city sport had of Donald's presence was his voice as he accosted him.

"Good-evening, Mr. Lang," spoke the young reporter.

Larry started and looked at Donald as the color left his face.

"I believe I don't know you," he answered.

"Perhaps not; our acquaintance has not been very close. I have seen you several times behind Mr. Strauss's counters."

Larry threw a frightened look around the room. Donald had reached delicate ground.

"When did you quit Mr. Strauss's employ?"

"Some time ago."

"For good, may I ask?"

"Yes."

"Your relations were always pleasant, I presume?"

"Quite so."

"I had a talk with Mr. Strauss since you left."

The young sport colored.

"Are you in my old place?" asked Larry.

"No. I could not think of giving up my present berth for Solomon Strauss's counters."

"You are—"

"I am Donald Dustin, the friend of Rosa. Is

it possible, Mr. Lang, that you have not suspected me before this?"

The half-smoked cigar almost dropped from Larry's fingers.

"What do I know about the person you call Rosa?" he exclaimed.

"A good deal!" was the response, and Donald leaned forward as he lowered his voice. "Solomon Strauss is very anxious to see you, and the police will want you unless you tell the truth to me about the girl."

"By Jupiter! you have a power of cheek!" cried Larry, bursting into a derisive laugh. "This is the first time I've ever had blackmail attempted on me."

Donald flushed to the temples.

"Blackmail, you miserable rascal!" he scornfully retorted. "You can't laugh down the charges I can bring against you, theft and abduction. Here! quiet down, and don't attract the crowd."

"Go to Halifax!" retorted Larry, starting back. "I don't want anything to do with you. If you attempt to follow me—"

Donald stepped instantly after him.

"You don't slip away in this manner!" he cried. "I am here to make you hear me!" And he caught Larry's arm and jerked him under the electric light.

In an instant all the tiger of the city sport's nature seemed to spring into being. He wheeled upon Donald with a flash in his eyes and an oath on his lips.

"Release me!" he snarled. "By heavens! things have come to a pretty pass when a gentleman isn't safe in New York's best hotels!"

He spoke in a tone of voice heard by the scattered groups in the lobby, and all eyes were turned to the speaker. At the same time Larry jerked back and raised the thick rattan cane he held in his hand.

The next moment Donald darted at him, and threw up one hand to ward off the blow about to descend upon his head. This action exasperated Larry still further, and the cane descended with force as the young reporter struck out from the shoulder!

During the next second several blows were given and received by the enemies, but Donald was too quick for the sport, and all at once a well-directed blow sent the scoundrel against the marble-topped counter at the clerk's desk!

Larry struck the marble with a dull thud and would have dropped to the floor if some one had not prevented.

"He is sufficiently punished," said a gentleman, touching Donald's arm. "You have made an item for your pencil; now go off and write it up."

The man had recognized Donald as a reporter, and as he finished, he took the young man's arm and led him through the crowd to the sidewalk.

Fortunately for Donald there was no policeman on the scene, and he walked away unmolested.

"May be I was foolish, but I could not help it," he remarked to himself. "I have showed the rascal that he can't laugh down some charges with impunity. My only regret is that I did not give him more than I have. When he recovers, he will do what? The first thought will be of Rosa and he will fly to see whether she is safe. He won't cause my arrest. I know Larry too well for that."

As Donald left the hotel Jack o' Diamonds came up, but the two did not meet. The crook did not want to appear on the scene just then, and, as we have seen, he walked off until everything had settled down.

Larry had been taken to his room where half an hour later he was confronted by the disguised crook who came in on tip-toe, anxious and somewhat displeased.

Larry met him with a lugubrious smile.

"This is an excellent way to keep a secret!" Jack exclaimed. "If you don't keep out o' broils the whole thing will go up the flume, an' I will lose my prize."

"I could not keep it. That was Rosa's reporter, the young man who has been looking for her ever since we played the little hand that took the bird. He made my blood hot, and I raised my cane when he landed one between my peepers, almost flooring me. Wait! I'll get even, Jack. Before to-morrow night I'll be more than even with the pencil-shover. What time is it?"

Jack o' Diamonds glanced at his watch and told Larry the time.

"What news have you got, Jack?" the city sport asked.

"Some little," replied the crook, as his eyes twinkled. "In the first place, we sprung the

trap on the wharf-rat spy, and, secondly, the ring will never rise to accuse you."

Larry uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

"This is news, indeed!" he cried. "Jack, you're the boss web-weaver in Gotham. How goes the game I opened at Peter Prayne's?"

"It couldn't go better. Even now Red is feathering our nest in a substantial manner. Don't you see that you can't afford to get mixed up in any broils? That young reporter knows something, and you don't want to make him hot."

"That is good logic," smiled Larry. "I will go ahead and play my game out before I stop. What kind of a man is the old lawyer Fergus Fleece?"

"He's good for some things, like hunting up heirs an' such cases. What business have you with Fergus Fleece?"

Larry hesitated.

"I have a friend, you do not know him, who has been beaten by the old lawyer."

"In what way?"

"The old rascal purloined a valuable paper."

"He'll do that. I know him!" exclaimed Jack. "If your friend wants it, he'll have to pay well for it."

"Can't it be obtained in no other way?" asked Larry, leaning forward.

The young man's voice betrayed his anxiety.

"Your friend can't frighten Fergus," Jack went on. "The old man isn't one o' that kind. What is the paper worth?"

"Two hundred."

A sneer curled the crook's lips.

"I wouldn't lose time for that amount!" he exclaimed. "The paper can't be very valuable, else its recovery would be worth more than two hundred."

Larry bit his lips and cursed his lack of funds.

"Let it go. After awhile I'll recover the paper myself."

Half an hour later Larry was able to leave his room.

Jack o' Diamonds had departed by the front way, but the victim of the young reporter's rage went quietly down a private stair and reached the street.

A short distance from the hotel he slipped into a cab and gave the driver the same orders he had given him on a previous occasion.

He liked this driver; he did not permit any hanging on behind, and when he undertook to whip a street Arab loose, he did not stop short of the accomplishment of the task.

Larry's face had been made presentable by the hotel barber and while he was borne rapidly through the streets of New York he cursed Donald Dustin roundly for the punishment he had inflicted.

"There is war to the knife between us, Mr. Dustin!" grated Larry. "I cannot have you hauled up before a magistrate for your attack, but I can deal a blow that will make you stagger."

After awhile the cab stopped and let Larry out.

He sprung across the sidewalk and rung a door bell. In a moment he stood face to face with a woman.

"The young lady is gone," ejaculated this woman.

Larry seemed to recoil a step. He lost color and began to stammer.

"Gone? gone?—Rosa—"

"She gave me the slip about an hour ago!"

Larry leaned against the wall and gasped.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNEXPECTEDLY NABBED.

"THIS is a catastrophe sure enough!" mentally exclaimed Larry, before he fairly caught his breath. "Here, Rosa is gone; she has given her keeper the slip, and I'm left in no enviable position."

Then he turned upon the woman who confronted him, and said madly:

"I thought she was to be watched like a hawk?"

"Well, wasn't she?" was the retort. "Do you mean to insinuate that I didn't do my duty?"

She came toward Larry with clinched hands, and the young man seeing her gaze, shrunk to the wall.

"I didn't intend to insinuate anything," he hastened to say. "I am sorry the girl is gone. About an hour ago, you say?"

"Yes."

"Well, I can't mend matters by remaining here."

"You can settle before you go. There are fifty dollars back on the bargain."

"But the girl is not here," protested Larry.

"That doesn't dissolve the agreement. Fifty dollars before you leave the house."

Driven to a corner by the demeanor and resolution of the woman, Larry produced his pocket-book and paid the amount with the best grace he could assume, then, with a growled "good-night," he left the woman to herself and turned away.

Rosa gone!

The thought, the catastrophe, put Larry's brain in a whirl. The gas-lamps seemed to dance when he touched the sidewalk.

What had become of the girl? Had she gone back to her old quarters, Mrs. Hartwick's boarding-house? Had she already told the story of her adventures to the police?

"If I could find Jack just now, I'd know what to do," muttered Larry; "but where will I look for him?"

At last the young sport resolved to go back to the hotel.

Rosa did not know that he had been making it his headquarters, and in his room there he could think out the plan of the next campaign.

Larry had failed to hold the girl whom he intended to make Mrs. Lang. The abduction, with Jack's help, had proved successful, and the boat abandoned in the harbor had fooled the river police. The loss of the diamond ring had been counterbalanced by the springing of Jack's trap on Dick Sly.

If Rosa had not escaped Larry would have had reason to congratulate himself. As it was, his pet scheme was not getting on very well.

If he had known where to look for Jack o' Diamonds at that hour he would have gone straight to the crook, but he went back to the hotel and slipped up to his room unmolested.

Meantime Peter Prayne, the merchant in Jack's net, had gone home with Red Reynard at his side.

The crook's pal was to receive the twenty-five thousand dollars, as the reader remembers, and he had instructions not to leave the merchant until the sum had been paid.

All the way up-town Peter Prayne wished that something would turn up to "shake" the man who watched him like a hawk.

But nothing came to the merchant's rescue.

At last the end of the journey was reached, and the two men entered the library.

Red Reynard was courteous, but firm. He acted like a person who might have conducted several affairs of the kind, and Peter Prayne saw that he was as cool as the man he had left down-town.

The money was taken from the merchant's private drawer and paid over.

Red Reynard counted every bill before putting it beneath his coat, and certified to the correctness of Mr. Prayne's count.

"You know nothing about the business between Mr. Seldon and I?" said the merchant, at the conclusion of the transaction.

"Nothing," answered Red Reynard.

Peter Prayne knew better than this; but he did not reply, and a few moments later he let the man out, and turned away with a feeling of relief.

"I've got enough to go to Europe on," ejaculated Red, as he walked hurriedly to the nearest Elevated station. "I might try a game o' this kind against some fellows, but against Jack o' Diamonds, whew! it would be too risky!"

He was about to bound up the steps to the depot, when a light step in his rear made him turn, and a man stepped forward.

"Hold on, Mr. Fox. I want you!" he said.

Red Reynard leaned forward, for the man was not fairly in the light, and when he caught sight of him he started.

The next instant a second man came in sight, and the foremost one laid his hand on the crook's arm.

"We want you."

Red sprung back, but the men were upon him.

"What do you want?" he exclaimed.

"The body of Red Reynard!" was the reply. "Come, Mr. Fox; we have the bracelets for you!" And the click of a catch made the New York sport the manacled prisoner of the two officers.

"What am I wanted for?" he asked, glaring at his captors.

"For assisting to bleed a citizen."

"What citizen?"

"Peter Prayne."

"You have followed me."

"We have. You have just left Peter Prayne's house. We will search you at the station, Mr. Fox."

Red Reynard said no more.

"In fortune's name, whose work is this?" he

thought. "It isn't the boy's, for Jack's trap fixed him this afternoon. Has anybody taken his place? I can't believe it."

Red Reynard went sullen and speechless to the police-station, where the packet of money was found on his person. He was locked up for the night with the charge of extortion marked opposite his name, and left to reflect on the sudden change in his fortunes.

"If they know what I went to Peter Prayne's house for, they will walk in on Jack, and then the whole game will be up!" he exclaimed in the cell. "I'd give one-half of the amount I got from the merchant to-night if I could find out who put the detectives onto me."

Red Reynard could imagine Jack o' Diamonds waiting for him in the Beekman street office. He could see the expression of rage and disappointment on his partner's face as he came not, and finally he could imagine him lock the office for the night and spring away with an oath.

The truth is that Jack o' Diamonds did not wait long for Red Reynard.

When he left Larry at the hotel after his fight with the reporter he went back to Beekman street, where he waited a certain time for his comrade. Jack knew that Red Reynard dared not play him false; he was aware that his partner stood in actual and daily fear of him, and that if he was slow he would turn up in time with the money wrung from Peter Prayne.

When Jack left the office he walked toward that part of the city where we first met him, and not long afterward a woman sewing in a small room was startled by his sudden appearance.

It was Mother Sturgeon, Dick Sly's guardian, and she held up her finger in a warning way as the crook came toward her.

"Why, what's the matter?" inquired Jack.

"I've got new neighbors in the next room," was the reply.

"New fiddlesticks! but I'll lower my voice out o' respect for them. Where's Dick?"

"He hasn't been here for a day or so. I guess the boy has deserted me for good."

"Are you very sorry?"

"There was a good deal in the boy."

"A good deal of mischief!" ejaculated Jack.

"What did he ever do with the ring?"

"I can't find it, though I've searched his quarters from ceiling to floor."

"He has given you the slip completely."

"Not in the end he didn't!" exclaimed Jack with a leer. "Do you think you can get along without Dick?"

Mother Sturgeon smiled.

"I've been doing it pretty much since he's taken to the docks," she replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh! the youngster may take a notion to stay about the docks," answered Jack. "I guess they suit him better than Mother Sturgeon's house anyhow?"

The woman made no reply, but as her eyes dropped to the work in her lap a sigh escaped her and was caught by the dark-faced man watching her.

Deep in Mother Sturgeon's heart was a feeling for the boy who had slept under her roof, and whose earnings more than once had been emptied into her lap.

Jack o' Diamonds seemed to notice this, and his eyes got a mad flash behind their heavy black lashes.

"Well, if the boy takes a notion to stay away, don't cry for him," he suddenly went on. "He belonged to the wharves anyhow, and was getting entirely too 'fly' for people who want to make a living without interference."

The next moment Mother Sturgeon caught the crook's eye, and he saw her dart forward and clutch his wrist.

"You've fixed the boy as you call it!" she exclaimed. "You found that he was likely to interfere with you in some scheme—in some scheme connected with the ring, maybe. You can't afford to go too far. You know that the police of New York are onto you—that they know your past and your present."

"To Halifax with the police!" growled Jack, jerking loose from her grasp, and drawing back.

"You know that you're the only person in the world for whom I have any respect!" he cried.

"Do you mean to threaten me, Alice?"

"Not for thousands! There isn't money enough in the vaults of Wall street to turn me against you, Jack. But you want to go slow. Think of the past, the doors that have closed upon you—"

"I won't! I won't!" almost yelled the crook, springing to his feet. "I am playing the biggest and deepest game of my life, and woe to

the person or persons who attempt to balk me. I don't want any of your advice, Alice. Let me alone. Good night. When your wharf-rat detective shows up, drop me a line, ha, ha!" And while his laugh rung in Mother Sturgeon's ears the door opened and shut, and he was gone!

CHAPTER XV.

THE RAT AT LARGE.

WHEN Larry Lang awoke the next morning his first thought was of the girl who had escaped the night before.

He again wondered if she had gone back to Mrs. Hartwick's.

"One thing is certain; I have not tumbled into the arms of the police!" he exclaimed. "Rosa will relate her story with much embellishment to the reporter, and he will proceed to turn the thumb-screws of the law on me. I must beat them both. Fergus Fleece may keep the paper he stole from me as it cannot do me any good now. Give me a chance and I'll give them all the slip!"

Larry resolved first to discover whether Rosa had returned to her boarding-house and secondly, to get beyond the clutches of the law as speedily as possible.

His first move was to slip quietly from the hotel and repair to a second-hand clothing store where he exchanged his fashionable clothes for a suit a little frayed, but passably genteel. Then he purchased a set of false whiskers suitable for his age, and thus disguised, set out for Mrs. Hartwick's.

When he had rung the door-bell of the widow's boarding-house he waited coolly for her appearance, and when she opened the door, and stood before him, Larry tipped his hat politely and wished her good-morning in a tone entirely unlike his usual one.

Mrs. Hartwick gave him a searching look, but failed to recognize him.

"I have called to see on business a young woman who boards here," Larry began. "Her name is Rosa Rogers—"

"Rosa has not come home!" exclaimed Mrs. Hartwick.

"Where will I find her?"

"I do not know."

"But she boards with you?"

"When she is here."

Larry drew back.

"I will come again," he continued. "I wanted to see her for my employer, Philip Potts, of Duane street. Rosa sews some, I believe?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. She may be in to-morrow. I will call again to see her."

He went away.

"The disguise is perfect," he said to himself. "Mrs. Hartwick has seen me hundreds of times, but she failed to recognize me. Rosa has not returned. In fortune's name what became of the girl last night?"

And Larry's face got a puzzled look.

The young man felt more at ease as he walked from the house where he had tried his disguise to his satisfaction. He did not know where to look for Jack o' Diamonds, as the crook had numerous haunts, and he did not know anything about Red Reynard's arrest.

He avoided the cars and kept to the sidewalk, where he stood in less danger of recognition.

"Hello!" suddenly cried a voice at his elbow. "Vere you grow dot beard, eh, Meester Larry?"

The words went through the young sport like a knife.

"I know the man without looking!" mentally decided Larry. "It is my old employer, Solomon Strauss, the last person I want to meet."

The next moment there was a hand at his sleeve.

"Don't run away, Larry. I vants ter talk ter mine old clerk vot I lose all of a sudden some days ago," continued the hawk-billed Jew who had confronted the young man.

Larry's first impulse was to knock the man down and run, but he saw that such action would only raise a hue and cry, and eventually land him in the hands of the police.

It was a Jewish holiday, and Solomon Strauss, arrayed in his best clothes, was enjoying it when he ran against his former clerk.

"What did you call me?" suddenly asked Larry, assuming an indignant expression, as he looked into the Jew's face.

"You vas mine old clerk, Larry Lang. I would know you 'mong a t'ousand peoples. Vot you wear dot beard for, hey?"

"Larry Lang, am I?" cried the young sport. "You don't want to mistake me for one of your race. Who are you?"

"Solomon Strauss, vot sells clodings on Baxter street."

"Oh! Well, Solomon, what do you want?"

"I vants ter talk mit you, Larry."

"Not now. I have business up-town."

The grip of the Jew tightened.

Mr. Strauss was not to be hoodwinked by a falsehood.

"Mine shop ish just around der corner," he remarked. "You will go mit me, Larry. Dare ish some dings I wants hexplained."

No wonder Larry drew back.

He did not want to be faced by the peculations he had committed while in the Jew's employ. He knew he could not make them good, and Solomon Strauss was not very forgiving. A few feet away stood a burly policeman, who seemed ready to step to Solomon's assistance, and a glance at him made Larry apparently docile.

There was a glitter in the Jew's eyes, and a moment later Larry was conducted away.

"If I don't give this sheeny the slip may I never see fortune's face again!" he muttered. "I know what will follow if he gets me beyond his doors. I'll be stripped of every cent I have, and Mrs. Strauss, a real lioness, will hold me up while her husband works the racket. You've caught a hawk instead of a pigeon, Solomon. Go on and let me prove it."

Just around the corner was Baxter street, and the part struck by Larry and his captor was the clothing merchant's paradise of New York.

Larry went with the Jew without opposition. He wondered how Solomon had penetrated his disguise when Mrs. Hartwick had not. He did not know that his gait, which he had not changed, had given him away to his old employer.

In a little while the Jew conducted Larry into an alley at the mouth of which stood his place of business whose interior was familiar to the young man.

At a rude door Solomon stopped and produced a key.

"Now's my time!" passed through Larry's mind. "If he gets me in the trap, I'll come out used up, if I get out at all."

The next moment just as Solomon was opening the door he had unlocked, Larry jerked back.

The Jew uttered a loud cry and turned.

"Not yet, my old fox!" ejaculated Larry, as he caught the Israelite who sprung at him, and held him at arm's length. "I don't go into your trap. If you follow me, or raise a cry I'll give away your transactions about those condemned goods, and the fire!"

"Mine Gott! vot you say?" gasped the Jew, suddenly white.

"I'll blow that fire business to the police!" was the answer. "Go into your shop and let me go in peace. I guess I hold the best hand, Solomon. I didn't want to say this on the street, but I can tell you here. Now, go!"

He pushed the Jew toward the door which opened as he touched it, and the next instant Solomon Strauss pitched headlong into his own house.

"My card was played at the right time!" laughed Larry, as he turned away.

The city sport was at the mouth of the alley again, and a moment later had joined the pedestrians.

Nobody, apparently, had witnessed his encounter with the Jew, and he had congratulated himself on this score.

"Give me an hour, and I will cease to be a citizen of Gotham!" he cried.

"There, that is the man!" ejaculated a voice near him at that moment.

Larry heard every word, and was thrilled.

All at once a hand that seemed to give him an electric shock was laid on his shoulder.

"I'm the man," thought Larry.

The following second he had been brought to a standstill, and was looking into the face of a large man.

"That is the fellow; that is Mr. Larry Lang!" exclaimed a youthful voice, and Larry saw a boy step to the man's side. "He's got false whiskers on, and all that, but I know him. I've followed him all the way from his hotel."

Larry was thunderstruck. He had been followed, and the boy was a spy.

"Who is this young imp of Satan?" he flashed, leaning toward the boy, whose eyes had a sparkle of victory and delight.

"I'm Dick Sly, the Dodger o' the docks!" was the answer.

"You that wharf imp! Why, I thought that—"

"That Jack o' Diamonds's trap in 'the chapel' caught me, eh, Larry?" laughed the lad. "I'm here to prove that the trap caught nobody. I guess you're the man I want."

The young sport turned pale.

"What is the charge against me?" he demanded.

"Abduction—brought by the boy here. He says that Mr. Solomon Strauss, your former employer, will probably bring another charge," the officer answered.

"He will do nothing of the kind," exclaimed Larry. "As for the charge of abduction, it won't hold water."

"Not if Rosa comes forward and tells her story?" put in the boy.

"Rosa?"

"You didn't find the girl at Mrs. Hartwick's, did you? Well, I should whisper not, my light-fingered clerk o' Baxter street! Rosa will be on hand when wanted; don't give yourself any uneasiness on that score."

Larry made no reply, and in silence he was conducted from the scene of his mishap with the hand of the stalwart officer at his wrist.

The game was up, and he had tarried too long near the scene of his last play.

The Dodger did not lose sight of Larry until he saw him beyond the doors of the station, and when he walked from the building there was a smile on his lips.

"One more, the boss of the gang, and my work is done. If I could, I'd let him go, for a certain woman's sake, but Justice wants him under cover."

Dick spoke thus while he hurried away watched though he knew it not by a man who had seen him land his prisoner at the station-house.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STORY OF THE TRAP.

"ALIVE, by the powers!" growled the man by whom Dick Sly was watched like a hawk. "Did the two rats play me false in 'the chapel'? Woe to their skins if they went back on Jack o' Diamonds!"

Meantime Dick had turned into a by-street and was making good time down the pavement.

Jack o' Diamonds had not lost sight of him, but he kept at a respectful distance unseen by the young dock spy detective.

Not long afterward the Dodger entered a house and was greeted by Donald Dustin, the young reporter, who uttered an exclamation of surprise at sight of him.

"That was a fine drubbing you gave Larry!" cried Dick, dropping into a chair before Donald could begin the twenty questions at his lips.

"You heard of it?"

"Yes. I am told that you went for him in good style. You couldn't wait, Donald?"

"No. The impudence of the fellow incensed me. I presume he will now play a new game against Rosa."

"He will do nothing of the kind."

"What do you know?"

"Larry has made new acquaintances."

"Who are they?"

"The police."

"What! has he fallen into their hands?"

"He has."

"What is the charge against him?"

"Abduction, with Rosa as the prosecuting witness."

"Then she has been found?"

"Rosa is found!"

Dick's last sentence was the greatest surprise of all. Donald sprung forward and caught the boy's arm.

"Found! Rosa found? Where is she, boy?"

"I thought I would startle you," laughed Dick, his eyes sparkling like twin stars. "You'd probably fly to her right away and leave me to follow at my leisure if I told you. Just wait a bit. I have a little more news."

"Go on!" cried the impatient youth. "You look like you know more than a morning paper."

"Our old friend Jack o' Diamonds sprung a trap under the docks a few hours ago," continued the boy detective.

"On you?"

"On 'Richard Sly, Esquire,' as Silas Seldon would call me. His tool, Tony Whack, lured me to 'the chapel' where was set a trap of which I knew nothing till yesterday. I was warned in a strange manner, and by a boy who is worth his weight in gold to Jack o' Diamonds if he can play his big game out. I was on my way to 'the chapel' when I was touched by something in the darkness, and then I heard a low voice. I got down and felt with my hands, for I could not see anything, and discovered a boy who gave the whole scheme away."

"I was told not to go to the middle of 'the chapel' which is a hollow under the wharf. The boy who called himself 'Prince Peter' then told me about the plan for my destruction, a plan which he had heard discussed by Jack o'

Diamonds, Tony Whack and Bender. The boy is in Jack's power, and he is holding him back like a trump card. I could hardly get away from the little fellow whose lower limbs seem to be useless. He wanted to tell me every thing he had heard, but, most of all, he wanted to baffle the rascals who had set the trap for me.

"Well, I went to 'the chapel' as I had promised Tony. He met me there, but Bender was not to be found. Tony had agreed to give me some information about Peter Prayne, the merchant's lost boy. He wanted me to accompany him to the bottom of the basin. I did so but when he withdrew to see that there were no listeners around, I scrambled back, and waited. All at once a strange noise grated on my ear and I knew that a trap of some kind had been sprung. If Prince Peter told the truth, the bottom of the basin disappeared for a moment. It sounded like something of that kind. As noiselessly as I could, I crept from the place without letting Tony and Bender know that I had escaped. They are still in the dark; but Red Reynard, who bled Peter Prayne to the tune of twenty-five thousand dollars last night, knows that some rats are sharper than the traps."

"Since my escape from Jack o' Diamonds's dead-fall, I have thrown Red Reynard into the hands of the detectives. I followed him and Peter Prayne to the merchant's house, and at the steps of an 'L' depot, I had the villain turned over. The whole lot are caged now but Jack."

"The coolest and shrewdest of all!" ejaculated Donald. "If he suspects that you have eluded him he will take flight and not get his just dues."

"I would be willing to call it quits," was the singular reply.

The young reporter gave Dick a surprised look.

"After all he has done—after his infamous dock trap?" he exclaimed.

"There are some things you don't know, Donald," was the answer. "But Justice cannot afford to let Jack slip through her fingers. I am going to the end of the scheme. Now, Donald, I will put you on the trail to, Rosa, but you must not publish anything about the romance that began with the mystery of a ring till I give you authority."

"I agree, Dick; but I've got two columns in my head now, and they're trying to get out."

Not long after this there was a pleasant meeting in a certain house and Rosa told Donald the story of her adventures.

The reporter listened with rising indignation to her account of Larry Lang's infancy; how Mrs. Hartwick had been decoyed from her home by Jack's voice at the window, how she (Rosa) had been decoyed from the house by a well-coined story about a sick friend by Larry, how she was forced to go aboard the boat with Larry and Jack, how she was taken to another boat in the harbor, while the first was abandoned to deceive the police, and how she was then rowed to the quarters prepared beforehand for her reception by the young rascal!

Larry's intention was to force the girl into a distasteful marriage, but her escape from the house, and her unexpected meeting with Dick Sly on the street had overthrown all his plans.

While Rosa was detailing all her experience to Donald a man appeared suddenly to two young larks sitting in the light of a lantern under the wharves.

"Here! you ought to be at the bottom o' the harbor with a stone about your necks!" cried the man. "What kind o' trap-throwers ar' ye, anyhow? Can't you catch a rat when you have 'im at hand?"

The two boys, Tony Whack and Bender, started back with scared faces, for a thundercloud of passion had darkened Jack o' Diamonds's face.

"A pretty kettle o' fish you made o' it!" he went on in a growl.

"What has happened, Jack?" asked Tony.

"The kid's alive!"

"Dick?"

"Dick."

The answer seemed to take the boys' breath.

"The next time I want you to do a thing, you'll know it; but there'll be no next time. Where's Prince Peter?"

The two boys threw a glance toward a pallet just beyond the rim of light.

Jack o' Diamonds crawled forward and bent over the emaciated body that lay on the dirty straw.

"My trump card after all," he muttered to himself. "I tell ye, Peter, that button was what brought him to time."

The next moment he picked the boy up softly, and came back to Tony and his companion.

"I'm going to take Prince Peter to better

quarters," he remarked, replying to their inquisitive looks. "You fellows kin stay here and spring traps for some one else; but remember! you don't want to play any games ag'in' Jack o' Diamonds!"

The look which accompanied the words was a startling threat only too well understood by those who heard. The two wharf rats made no reply, and when Jack o' Diamonds, carrying the crippled boy passed beyond the light, they had seen him for the last time.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RAT'S VICTORY.

JUST three days after these events, Mr. Peter Prayne found a letter on his private desk at the store. No one in his employ knew how it got there, but there it was to confront the merchant when he came down-town for the day.

Mr. Prayne broke the seal and read "several sentences written in this manner.

"MR. PETER PRAYNE:—If you really want your boy restored, play fair and don't buy off the negotiators. If you mean business, say so in to-morrow's *Herald* in a "personal" addressed to "Business." This is the last chance. I am the person, and the only one who knows.

BUSINESS."

As the merchant folded the note, a boy who had just entered the store walked up to the private desk and took off his hat with a cheery, bright-eyed "good-morning."

It was Dodger Dick, the Wharf Spy Detective.

"No clew yet, Richard?" asked the merchant. "Three days have passed since—"

"Since we nabbed Red Reynard, eh? This is the third day, sure enough."

"It cannot be that Jack o' Diamonds has got wind of the arrest?"

"No! The affair has been kept out of the papers, and Red is in close confinement. He is sullen and fierce, and will confess nothing, through fear of Jack. But I don't think we'll have to wait for Red to open his head."

"Then you have a clew?"

"Not much of one," smiled the boy.

"Well, what do you make out of that?" and Mr. Prayne handed Dick the anonymous letter.

The boy's eyes dilated as he read; when he looked up at the merchant his face was wreathed in smiles.

"The same old fox!" he exclaimed. "I can see his tracks all through this letter."

"It is from the ex-convict, is it?"

"It is from Jack. And to prove it, I ask you to look at this."

Dick produced a piece of crumpled paper from his pocket and placed it and the letter side by side on the merchant's desk.

"I see! Both are the work of the same hand!" declared Mr. Prayne.

"I know that Jack wrote this one," continued Dick, touching the crumpled paper.

"Then he wrote the other!"

The next moment the merchant leaned toward the boy spy. There was intense eagerness in his eyes.

"But do you know *for certain* that my boy—my long-lost son is in the convict's hands?" he cried.

"Yes," admitted Dick, candidly. "I do know it, Mr. Prayne. I owe my life to your boy! He saved me from one of the most infamous traps ever set in New York. I owe him something, you see; I owe him rescue from the hands of the man who plays him as a card to extort money from you."

The merchant flushed.

"Give me a chance at this man. Stand Jack o' Diamonds before me, and I will promise you that the law will never get to dally with the monster. But I leave the case with you, my boy. You are the best detective I want. Why, you beat them all. When will you report again?"

"When I have something to report. This is the third day and I think I have a clew."

"Follow it! Don't let the villain escape you. Remember that my boy's life is at stake!"

"I forgot nothing," was the reply, and the next moment the merchant was the only occupant of the little room.

The day, now well advanced with its roar and hum of business, was a busy one for Dick.

He was no longer the boy whom we first saw on the bales of the wharves; he had apparently deserted his old stamping-ground, and had transferred himself to another part of the city.

"Well, you have been baffled!" exclaimed Reporter Donald, as Dick entered his lodgings late in the afternoon. "I see that Jack o' Diamonds has given you the slip."

Dick's eyes glistened.

"He has poked his head into the law's noose," he answered, with a light laugh.

"What! do you mean that you have him?"

"No, but I can put my hand on the prize."

"Not on Jack?"

"On Jack, when he comes back to the new quarters; but on Prince Peter, now."

"You're a trump, Dick!"

"I've had a long hunt, and I feel a bit tired." Jack has taken Prince Peter away from the wharf nest; he wouldn't trust him any longer with Tony and Bender. But, and the boy's eyes twinkled with triumph, "he couldn't hide long from Dodger Dick, the ferret of the wharf. I have dropped in to tell you, Donald, that I hope to finish the job to-night."

"Not alone?"

"Of course not, but Jack will know that the rat has turned catcher."

It was verging onto eleven o'clock that night when a man climbed a narrow stair to the second floor of an obscure three-story building, and unlocked the door of a little room, untidy and dimly lighted.

In one corner of the apartment stood a narrow cot, which was occupied.

"Aren't you asleep yet, Peter?" he asked, bending over a cot, and looking into the bright eyes of a boy.

"I have been asleep, but a dream awakened me."

"You dream too much," growled the man.

"What did you dream this time?"

"I thought a splendid carriage drove up to the door, and I was taken up through the city to a magnificent house."

"Fudge! fiddlesticks!" growled the listener.

"That's all nonsense, Peter."

A knock sounded on the door.

"Who's that?" he exclaimed.

"Mebbe the little girl who was here yesterday. She said she would come back."

"But it is nearly midnight. Curse the street fairy if it be her!" And Jack o' Diamonds went to the door.

He unlocked it and opened it a little, when, all at once, it was dashed in his face!

"Surrender!" cried two stern voices at the same moment and the ex-convict who stood spell-bound in the light looked into the muzzles of two revolvers.

"That is the man!" exclaimed a boy coming forward. "That is Jack o' Diamonds!"

The look that passed from the convict's eyes to the young detective was one of tigerish fierceness.

"Caught by the rat after all!" he grated, and then submitted to the manacles.

It is not for us to describe the affecting restoration that followed the capture of the convict.

Prince Peter's dream speedily came true, for the fine carriage *did* come, and he was taken to a magnificent house up-town.

The merchant had found his boy, at last, and the doctors thought that the crippled limbs could be restored.

Some years before the opening of our story a child was run over in the streets, and the man who picked him up disappeared from view.

It now turned out that the child was little Peter Prayne, and that his abductor was a common thief who, dying afterward, left the crippled boy and his secret to Jack o' Diamonds.

In due course of time three criminal trials took place in the courts of New York.

At one Larry Lang was convicted and sentenced to a term in Sing Sing.

The second trial sent Red Reynard where he naturally belonged, and the third and most important one opened the prison doors again for the famous Jack o' Diamonds.

It then transpired why Dick Sly felt a little pity for the scamp. He was Mother Sturgeon's own brother, and the woman loved him, despite his villainies.

We hardly need say that Rosa became Mrs. Donald Dustin, nor that the young reporter wrote up in style the strange story which started with the finding of a diamond ring.

The paper Fergus Fleece stole from Larry never did anybody any good. The young sport always refused to say what it was.

Dick, the Wharf Spy Detective, was well rewarded for his work and the doors of a certain New York mansion are always open to him.

"I tell you what, Peter," he often says to a boy beginning to walk again, "it isn't always that the trap catches the rat."

"No," answers Peter with a laugh. "I know one trap that caught nothing."

The boys are great friends.

THE END.

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